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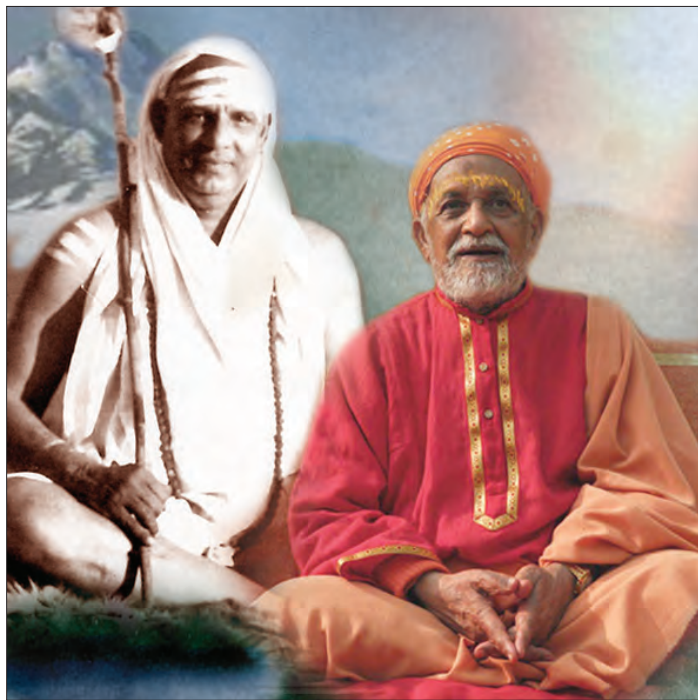
CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Hatha Yoga Book 8

A GUIDE TO SADHANA IN DAILY LIFE

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Hatha Yoga Book 8

A GUIDE TO SADHANA IN DAILY LIFE



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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



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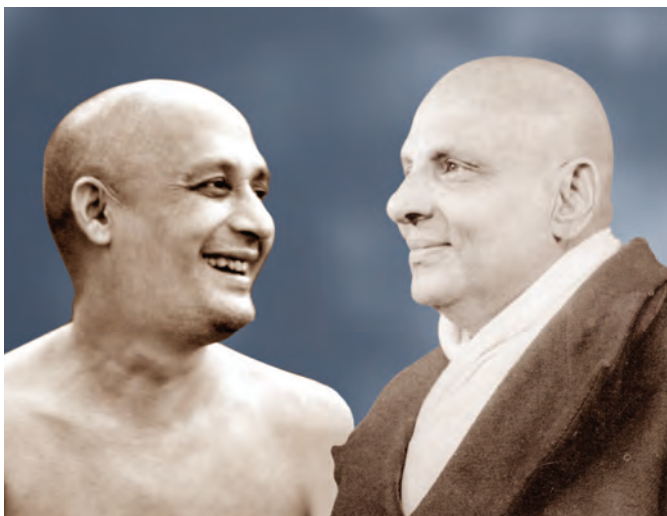
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjana

Contents

Preface	<i>ix</i>
Introduction	1
1. Inspiration from the Masters	5
2. Guidelines for Sadhana	13
3. The Sadhanas	
General wellbeing	21
Women's health	24
Children	26
Teenagers	29
Senior citizens	30
Stress management	32
Computer users	35
4. Practice Instructions	
Asana	38
Pranayama	91
Index of Practices	101

Preface

Talking only about the aim is philosophy; the method to get to the aim is a system; the aim and the method are sadhana, the transformative process. Yoga is sadhana.

—Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

The purpose of the in-depth exploration of the branches of yoga contained in *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is to inform and inspire aspirants to apply the principles of each branch in their own lives, that they may be uplifted and transformed by both the dynamism and subtlety of the yogic tradition. To accomplish this, the teachings must be lived; otherwise, the material has no value, it is merely words on pages. Successful implementation of the wisdom requires a simple, pragmatic approach, a map for the conscious living of life. The final volume of each *Conversations* set provides such a map. Titled *A Guide to Sadhana in Daily Life*, these practical, easy to follow booklets outline sadhanas for the various branches of yoga, be it karma, hatha, bhakti or raja yoga.

Sadhana is the personal effort every aspirant on the spiritual path must make in order to evolve. It is the practice, application, commitment and involvement without which yoga remains theory. The *Guide to Sadhana in Daily Life* booklets distil the essence of each branch of yoga, showing the way to personally experience the concepts

and discussions which constitute the main volumes. While those discussions provide the basis for the integration of yogic ideas and principles in everyday life to enhance the quality of one's experience and expression, it must always be remembered that yoga is a practice which needs to be lived in order for its meaning, method and aim to be fully understood and embodied.

Each booklet gives the spiritual aspirant various possibilities which can be modified and adapted according to the time available, individual inclination and circumstances. They show that adding yoga to one's daily routine and developing a yogic attitude does not necessitate changing one's situation or station in life. With common sense and pragmatism, yoga can be applied to meet one's needs, whatever they may be.

In today's world, time is a major factor and good time management skills are essential for everyone. Those who seek to improve everyday life by including spiritual practices need to set aside some time each day, knowing that it is not the amount of time spent but the regularity and sincerity of the practice that are of paramount importance. Fifteen minutes a day of one-pointed awareness on a chosen practice is better than an occasional hour without focus or purpose.

This definition of spiritual practice is given in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (1:14):

Sa tu dirgha kala nairantaryasatkarasevito drdhabhumih.

Practice, abhyasa, becomes firmly grounded by being continued for a long time with reverence, without interruption.

There are three conditions for practice or *abhyasa*: it should be done with complete faith; it should continue uninterrupted, and it should go on for quite a long time. When these three conditions are fulfilled, abhyasa becomes firmly established and a part of one's nature.

The *Guide to Sadhana in Daily Life* booklets offer tools to make this possible for everyone. To use the tools well, the desire to put theory into practice must be the motor and motivation of each aspirant, for only practice gives experience and only experience leads to change.

Introduction

Hatha yoga is the most accessible and popular form of yoga. Millions of people around the world practise some aspect of hatha yoga, benefiting their overall health and wellbeing, and so raising their quality of life. *A Guide to Sadhana in Daily Life* completes the Conversations collection on this important branch of yoga. The previous seven volumes have comprehensively presented a vast body of knowledge from both the classical and modern perspectives. All that remains is to act on the inspiration contained in those volumes by integrating regular hatha yoga sadhana into everyday life.

For this purpose a selection of hatha yoga capsules are outlined in the following pages. They are based around the needs of certain demographic groups, such as women, children and senior citizens. The capsules are not intended to be therapeutic, rather they are intended for people with a reasonable level of health who wish to enhance and maintain their overall wellbeing and experience of life.

Instructions for the practices are included, however it is always recommended that yoga be learned from a qualified teacher, as there are many subtle aspects to yoga practice which cannot be conveyed by a book. The benefits of attending a class are numerous, and even those with a regular daily sadhana at home are advised to continue attending a weekly class. In a class situation one is removed

from the home environment, its demands and associations, and trust is placed in the teacher to guide the sadhana. The value of this is immense, as the ability to relax fully while allowing the teacher to look after the class is quite different to the experience of home sadhana. Attending classes also means developing knowledge of the range of practices. Additionally there may be opportunities to attend workshops, seminars and retreats, deepening one's grasp of the breadth and application of yoga.

Complete yoga

Hatha Yoga Book 1: An Overview makes the point that the holistic application of yoga in life involves not just hatha yoga sadhana, but the appropriate integration of other branches of yoga as well. The Satyananda Yoga-Bihar Yoga system is based around this concept of integral yoga. For example, a Satyananda Yoga class includes yoga nidra and meditation, practices for mind management which are from the raja yoga tradition. Satyananda Yoga also advocates the need for yogic management of the emotions through bhakti yoga, of the actions through karma yoga and of the intellect through jnana yoga. Therefore, when applying the sadhanas in this booklet it needs to be kept in mind that they are limited to hatha yoga, and that to address one's needs more fully, practices such as yoga nidra and meditation are vital. As mentioned, attending classes gives that basis. Attending seminars and retreats, or spending time in an ashram provides an introduction to the attitudinal side of yoga, for example in relation to management of the mind, emotions and actions.

Connecting with peace

The spiritual dimension is at the heart of yoga, and even hatha yoga has this base and subtly opens that side of a person's nature. The hatha yoga practices alone clear negativity and tension from the body and mind by harmonizing the nervous systems, optimizing the respiratory

and endocrine systems, and of course toning the more obviously physical systems of the body.

The idea of spirituality need not be a mysterious one. Rather, it can be recognized as the emergence of one's inner essence, which has become clouded over and lost as the hurly burly of life conditions the individual to identifying with external experiences. To be spiritual simply means connecting with the peace that is inherent in the natural, unconditioned you; this requires developing the positive qualities of one's consciousness and energy, a process which naturally occurs with yoga sadhana. For many, hatha yoga is the starting point for aligning with this side of themselves.

True to the *Conversations* style, *Guide to Sadhana in Daily Life* includes the voice of the masters in question and answer format. In the chapter titled, 'Inspiration from the Masters', their wisdom on sadhana in general is given, while questions on the particular applications of hatha yoga accompany the relevant sadhana e.g. women's health.

For everyone

Hatha yoga sadhana is for everyone. It is a gift from the yogis past and present who have preserved, developed and disseminated this unique and powerful system for the benefit of humanity across the ages.

1

Inspiration from the Masters

What is the meaning of sadhana?

Swami Satyananda: In Sanskrit, *sadhana* means spiritual effort, not physical or mental effort. It is the effort made to open the doors beyond which there is enlightenment. The term sadhana is a collective name for all those techniques which are deliberately adopted to remove the imperfections of the personality.

Sadhana is the effort one makes to identify with the joy and sorrow of everyone, to extend the horizons and rise above the pettiness of life; this should be the aim of sadhana. Sadhana is a highly developed science of evolution; it is practised for the evolution of oneself. Therefore, sadhana is not the end, but the means.

What is the purpose of sadhana?

Swami Sivananda: The purpose of sadhana is to release life from the limitations with which it is bound, to free one from the thralldom of matter and the fetters of prakriti, to make one realize one's absolute independent nature. By perfecting sadhana the aspirant will be freed from birth and death, and enjoy eternal bliss. This is the goal. This is the dharma of the sadhaka. One has taken birth as a human being in order to reach this goal here and now, in this very birth. If one does not strive to reach this goal, one is wasting one's life and neglecting God's precious gift of human birth.

The practice of sadhana helps the aspirant to control the emotions and passions, and gives the power to resist temptations and remove the disturbing elements from the mind. To this end sadhana should make one ever cheerful, more concentrated, joyful, balanced, peaceful, contented, blissful, dispassionate, fearless, courageous, compassionate, angerless, 'I-less, desireless and mineless.

Sadhana should give a rich inner life, introspective inner vision and equilibrium under all conditions of life. These are the signs of spiritual growth. Seeing visions, lights, hearing transcendental sounds, etc., do not have much spiritual value, although they indicate that one has attained some small degree of concentration.

Why is sadhana important in spiritual life?

Swami Sivananda: Sadhana is the secret of success on the spiritual path. Just as butter can be extracted from milk only after churning, similarly, if the *sadhaka*, the spiritual aspirant who practises sadhana, wants to realize God, sadhana, spiritual practice or discipline, must be performed regularly and constantly in earnest.

Through the process of sadhana man's divine nature unfolds and is able to find positive expression in the intellectual, emotional and physical aspects of life, on individual as well as social planes.

Through sadhana one can have complete mastery over the mind, passions, emotions, impulses, temper and tongue. The body and mind will be ever at one's beck and call. Regular spiritual practice gives calmness of mind at all times. It can help in business life as well as in daily life, and give restful sleep. Sadhana will infuse the aspirant with new strength, confidence and self-reliance.

The essence of sadhana is to behold the Supreme and rest in divinity. Real sadhana is seeing God in everything and transmuting evil into good. Sadhana is any spiritual practice that helps the aspirant to attain the goal of human life, to

attain perfection, to realize God. Sadhana is steadying the mind and fixing it on the Lord.

What is the relevance of sadhana to daily life?

Swami Satyananda: Sadhana is no longer confined to mysticism and philosophy. It is the practical application of the techniques in daily life. Sadhana does not have any preconceived axioms or philosophy. It can be practised by those who believe in religion and those who do not, by those who believe in morality and those who do not, and by those who believe in higher spiritual life and those who do not. Sadhana needs to be understood in the context of one's own life.

What is meant by evolution through sadhana?

Swami Satyananda: Human beings are not just static creatures born to eat, drink, live and die. Where have we come from and where are we going? As Lord Krishna said to Arjuna, "Many lives have gone by and many lives will come again, because evolution is an unending process." Everything in this universe is evolving, right from matter to spirit. Matter is evolving and undergoing constant change even in the realm of physics. The mind is higher matter which is also undergoing a constant, natural and systematic transformation from age to age, from year to year. A time will come when mind and matter undergo an ultimate transformation into spirit.

Sadhana for the evolution of the entire mass consciousness is the sadhana of the twenty-first century. Every individual has a mission, a purpose. If he has no purpose, the whole of creation, the whole of existence, all philosophy and all religions are completely baseless and purposeless.

How does sadhana reduce the karmic load?

Swami Satyananda: Karmas are quick to accumulate. Samskaras, which determine the future karma, are continually building up. In order to counteract this constant inflow

of impressions, a spiritual practice must be consistently followed, so that one does not become overburdened and bend with the weight.

During the period of sadhana, the thoughts, passions, desires and other karmas are expended at the subtle and causal levels, and one emerges cleansed of many impurities and obstructions. That is precisely why there is a refreshed and light feeling after an hour of spiritual practice, because the burden that has been carried for many decades in the different realms of consciousness has decreased. It is like shedding a heavy weight and releasing the tension.

How can spiritual awareness be cultivated?

Swami Niranjanananda: In order to cultivate spiritual awareness, one must move from tamas to sattwa. This is the definition of spiritual awareness, of spiritual realization. Identify not with the changing and craving nature of the mind but with the pure, luminous and peaceful nature of the mind. The journey from tamas to sattwa is the spiritual journey. This is the essence; this is the secret of spiritual life.

The process which takes one from tamas to sattwa has a name, and that is sadhana. Generally, when we use the word 'sadhana', people identify it with a spiritual discipline, a spiritual practice. However, sadhana means attainment of perfection in that which you do.

What is the role of mind management in sadhana?

Swami Niranjanananda: The regulation of sensory and mental behaviour is known as sadhana. Sensory education takes place at the physical level, the sensorial level and the interactive level. It is an interactive process: you and the world.

Sadhana is a process that leads to mastery and perfection. It is a type of discipline, as without discipline no sadhana can be achieved or fulfilled. Therefore, the main subject and focus of sadhana is the preparation of the mind.

The mind is always being directed outward, and this mind has to be retrained. Keeping the mind happy does not mean allowing it to follow its whims. It means not coming into direct confrontation or conflict with the mind. The mind must be guided just as you would guide a child to do certain things, to behave and act in a certain manner. In this way, guide the mind, but do not fight with the mind. The moment one fights with their own mind, they become the loser; there is disturbance and loss of peace, *shanti*.

It is mental training that allows one to discipline the mind and, after that discipline, to embark on the path of sadhana. The management of the mind and entry into sadhana begins with the cultivation of mental awareness and by knowing, “What is my mood at present? How is that mood or mental condition making me behave, act and respond? Is it an appropriate or inappropriate response? Is it a positive or negative interaction?” This understanding has to come first.

When one knows how the mind responds, certain disciplines can begin to be incorporated into the mental behaviour; through discipline, the patterns of thought, the patterns of expression and the patterns of understanding can be changed.

What type of sadhanas suit different temperaments?

Swami Sivananda: Sadhana differs according to the temperament, tendencies and capacities of the aspirant, but remember that all paths lead to the same goal. Different stages of mental development and varying degrees of spiritual evolution naturally require different practices as the basis of sadhana.

Hatha yogis start their sadhana with the body and prana, by practising asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha. Their theory is that by controlling prana, the mind can be controlled. Raja yogis start their sadhana directly with the mind. They improve the quality of the mind by practising yama and niyama. They control the vrittis; they make the

mind blank. Gradually they take up the practice of dharana and dhyana in sadhana. Jnana yogis start their sadhana by enquiring into the higher mind and divine will; the jnani sees the one self in all. Bhaktas start their sadhana with devotion, faith and self-surrender. They express their compassion for humankind in selfless service. The bhakta visualizes his deity in all. Tantrics start their sadhana with shakti.

What is the outcome of sadhana?

Swami Satyananda: Equanimity, serenity, one-pointedness of mind and strong determination are acquired through sadhana. Lost confidence is regained. All these qualities are essential for successful living in all spheres of life, provided one knows how to use the energies generated by sadhana. The aim of sadhana should be to acquire knowledge, dispassion, devotion, power and peace. If one fails to develop these through sadhana, the way has been missed.

How should sadhana be developed?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are four categories for the development of sadhana:

1. Define your intention: Sadhana is the attainment of excellence and perfection in everything that is done. It begins with involvement in constant, continuous awareness and focus. In the absence of awareness and focus, sadhana is not sadhana; it is only a waste of time. There has to be awareness of the present mood and clarity of intention as to what is to be achieved.

First of all, know your intention. That is the primary requirement of starting any sadhana. There needs to be an understanding of the aim. If the intention is not clear, the journey cannot be started. When the decision has been made, "This is where I want to go," a path can be plotted on the map; this is the starting point for every aspirant.

2. Have conviction in the practice: The second point is the need for conviction in and dedication to your practice.

One must believe that what is going to be practised will lead to the goal. Conviction and practice must go together. If something is being practised, one should believe, one should be convinced, one should know that the practice is going to lead to the goal; that becomes the focus, the aim.

Every yoga and every practice has an aim, a goal, a target. Once the intention is clear and the path is plotted, the appropriate practices can be selected to achieve the goal.

3. Accept the change: The third aspect is accepting the change. If some change is experienced through sadhana, some transformation, be ready to accept it and not negate, deny or confront it. Many people do not accept change. They want to remain the same with an added quality, but how can one remain the same with an added quality? If a new quality is brought in, the reflection of that quality will be seen in one's behaviour, one's responses, one's actions and one's performance. There has to be openness to accept the change that occurs spontaneously and naturally, without compulsive and obsessive thinking as to why this is happening or why that is not happening.

Accept the change in whatever way it is felt, in whatever way it is observed. It is your response to sadhana. When one eats or drinks, external things go into the body. Satisfaction, happiness and enjoyment is your response to what you are eating and drinking. In the same manner, accepting the change and allowing it to take place is your response, knowing that it is going to take you in a different direction where you will be different; perhaps better, perhaps expressive, but different to what you were before.

4. Practise continuous improvement: The fourth category of sadhana is improving the changed nature with more conviction, faith, determination and belief. Integrate the practice and the change into life, and improve on it.

This is the process of sadhana in four categories. It can happen at a sensory level, a mental level, an emotional level and a spiritual level. Asanas are practices to improve

the quality and condition of the body and the senses. The method to improve the quality of the mind is meditation, in all its four aspects: pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. In the same manner, just as meditation is the practice to cultivate the mental faculties and creativity, bhakti yoga is the practice to cultivate balanced emotions, and mantra is the practice to cultivate spiritual awareness.



2

Guidelines for Sadhana

Once the decision has been made to adopt a sadhana, the first step has been taken in yoga. The *sankalpa*, resolve, to embark upon a regular practice is a significant moment, expressing the desire and inspiration to create a positive change in some aspect of one's life. It shows both recognition that transformation is possible, and the motivation to act on that recognition.

Before embarking on sadhana, it is essential to have a realistic understanding of one's goals and circumstances. Yoga is a pragmatic system which gives many guidelines and tools to help optimize accomplishments in sadhana. Tested in the laboratory of time, thousands of years of experience are available to help the practitioner succeed! Everyone's situation is certainly unique, but all have human nature in common. Bearing this in mind, each individual sadhana needs to be based on some general principles. These principles are recommended by the classical books of the yogic tradition and offer a commonsense approach to leading a balanced life. They support the effort made to uplift oneself through sadhana.

Know the aim

Why do you want to do sadhana? The reason may be physical, mental, emotional, spiritual or a combination. Clarity of intention makes sadhana more powerful at a number of levels.

Based on a clear aim, the right sadhana can be planned with the help of a teacher. If the aim is to strengthen the back, certain asanas must be chosen. If the aim is to improve the digestion, certain shatkarmas and asanas need to be done. If the aim is relaxation, a combination of asanas, pranayamas and yoga nidra may be used. If the aim is emotional stability, hatha yoga needs to be wisely combined with raja, bhakti and karma yoga. If the aim is spiritual, the connection with a source of inspiration becomes the foundation of sadhana.

In this way, once the aim is defined, a program can be devised accordingly. Also, if the intention is clear, the deeper layers of the mind become receptive to the sadhana, enhancing the results.

Lifestyle

Success in sadhana requires an appropriate lifestyle. Half an hour or an hour of yoga each day cannot make up for indulgent, erratic living. For this reason, the yogic tradition has always advocated a particular lifestyle in combination with the practice of sadhana. The principles of a yogic lifestyle are:

Regularity of routine: this includes regular times for meals and for rising and going to bed. Meals should be taken during daylight hours when the digestive system is most active. Early to bed and early to rise also ensure a healthy, natural sleep pattern. A regular time should be kept for sadhana.

Diet: the diet should be simple, fresh and balanced. Snacking between meals and overeating is to be avoided. When taking meals the stomach should be half-filled with food, one-quarter with water and one-quarter left empty.

Moderation in exertion: the body and mind should not be stressed by overexertion, whether physical or mental. Maintain equilibrium within the body-mind.

Influences: just as the physical diet needs to be moderate and healthy, so too the diet for the mind and emotions.

This means being aware of and minimizing exposure to disturbing and destabilizing influences: for example, the type of entertainment, the type of socializing and negative emotional involvement in relationships. It means choosing exposure to uplifting experiences. This includes spending time in positive environments, inspiring situations, being with like-minded people and reading inspirational literature.

Living environment: yoga recommends living in a peaceful place where the air and water are clean. This means social peace as well as environmental purity. A culture that is open-minded allows individuals to pursue their goals in life without worry. A healthy natural environment is full of prana, giving natural vitality and brightness. The home should be simple and clean, the atmosphere cooperative and supportive. If possible, have a room or space that is just for sadhana; the purity of such a place helps one to relax and connect more deeply with the practices.

Anushthana

The concept of anushthana is extremely helpful when developing sadhana. *Anushthana* means defining a set period of time for a specific sadhana. Most people find it difficult to sustain regularity of sadhana, especially at first: forever is a long time. Therefore, it may be more realistic to say, “I will practise this sadhana for one week and then review.” At the end of the week, assess and decide to continue or modify for another set period of time, depending on needs and circumstances.

The anushthana can be any length. A practice can even be observed for just one hour! For example, decide to have only positive thoughts for one hour. Every time a negative thought arises, be aware of it and reject it. If that can be managed for one hour, perhaps in the next hour, the tendency of positive thinking will start to become a habit without so much effort. But for the hour, a special effort was made. Other sadhanas, such as shatkarmas or SWAN meditation can be practised once a week, at a set time.

This principle can be applied to any type of sadhana, whether of hatha yoga, meditation, mantra, bhakti or karma yoga. This means the approach to sadhana can be flexible. When an anushtana is decided upon, one makes sure there is time available for it. Rather than risking failure in maintaining regularity, this approach brings confidence and positivity.

Attitude

Certain mental qualities are essential to sadhana: awareness, the attitude of a witness and freedom from expectation.

Yoga cannot be practised without awareness. Without awareness, it is not yoga. Awareness means observing the finest details of one's experience, whether it be a physical, mental, emotional or spiritual experience. In asana, become aware of the feeling of the body moving, stretching and relaxing. In pranayama, become aware of the entire experience of the breath – its depth, quality, duration, limitation and expansion. In meditation, become acutely aware of the experience of the mind, whether in the form of thoughts, feelings or images. In karma yoga, become aware of interactions with the world and the underlying patterns of thought and behaviour. In bhakti yoga, become aware of emotional patterns. In jnana yoga, become aware of the inner self, by observing strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs. Through this awareness one begins to know oneself more thoroughly.

The cultivation of awareness develops into the attitude of being a witness. This means observing the experience without becoming lost through involvement in it. The experience may be of body, breath or mind but the feeling is of having stepped back, having created a little space between oneself and the experience. This means there will be greater objectivity, less identification with the experience and an opportunity to respond consciously, rather than to simply react automatically. The attitude of the witness which is practised during sadhana is training for bringing this

attitude into daily life, as one must in the practice of karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga.

Freedom from expectation allows an expanded state of consciousness. This means it opens up possibilities. As long as there is expectation of a certain result, that idea will be the focus of the mind. If it is achieved, one is happy, but if it is not, there is disappointment. It is a self-limiting attitude, as it may suppress other outcomes or experiences. It is also a self-centred attitude, as it presumes knowledge of the effect of sadhana, whether the expectation is positive or negative. Yoga has its own process and that process needs to be trusted. One may or may not accomplish what one sets out to, but on the journey there will definitely be experiences and adventures of which there may have been no prior knowledge. Sadhana needs to be approached with openness and freedom of mind.

Common sense

Ultimately, common sense is needed in all spheres of life, including sadhana. Ideals are of no use without common sense. Whatever one's situation, there is a need to balance external life with a healthy inner life. Sadhana brings that balance, not only through the actual time of practice, but by strengthening connection with the more subtle dimensions of who one is, just as exercise strengthens a muscle.

This does not mean entertaining notions of enlightenment or altered states of consciousness. It means being realistic about making life a positive experience in which there is growth of consciousness and of connection with all that is good and pure, knowing that these qualities already exist in each of us, and that through one's efforts a light can be shone on them, establishing a stronger link and relationship with them. It is a matter of aligning with those qualities inside oneself and also in others, so that the positive nature becomes a source of power. This requires a clear, strong body and mind which can express wisdom in thought and action for dealing with situations appropriately

and effectively. In this way, the society one lives in and the lives of those one knows are enhanced. Sadhana, practised systematically and consistently, is the vehicle that takes one in this direction.

Using this booklet

The sadhanas outlined in this booklet are intended to be used in conjunction with the associated *Conversations* volumes. For example, the content in *Karma Yoga* books 4 to 6 explores and explains the concepts referred to in *Karma Yoga in Daily Life*. The books on hatha yoga explain the purpose, effects and sadhanas of the various hatha yoga practices in detail. The main volumes on each branch of yoga contain a vast body of knowledge which underpin the sadhanas. Referring to them will enrich and inspire the practitioner's development of yoga sadhana and lifestyle.

Branches of yoga such as hatha and raja include many specific techniques which must be learned from a suitably qualified Satyananda Yoga teacher. Satyananda Yoga is based on the approach of the gurus who are the voice of the *Conversations* books. Their teachings are the source of the sadhanas and, through their guidance, teachers all over the world have been trained in the 'technology' and methodology of yogic practices. Correct instruction from qualified teachers is essential.

Head, heart and hands

Finally, the idea of integral yoga needs to be remembered. Human beings are multifaceted; we are blessed with a complex and versatile physical body, a complex and versatile mental structure, a complex and versatile emotional capacity and a spiritual depth of vast potential. All these dimensions need care and understanding. The various branches of yoga exist for that purpose; therefore, integral yoga says, take a leaf from each branch with which to nourish the tree of life.

Integral yoga means having a balanced approach to yoga practice by integrating sadhanas from the different

yogas rather than focusing on only one aspect. Sometimes it is thought that hatha yoga is not needed, only meditation is needed, but everyone has a body and that body cannot sit comfortably for meditation if it is full of aches and pains and disturbances. Sometimes it is thought that the path of bhakti, purification of the heart, is all one needs, but how will that pure heart express its sentiments appropriately without karma yoga? Swami Sivananda said the yoga of head, heart and hands must be practised. If that can be done, our experience of life will blossom and its fragrance will bring joy wherever we are.



3

The Sadhanas

The following sadhanas are intended for practitioners with some training in yoga. To gain the most from hatha yoga it needs to be practised systematically, regularly and with awareness of one's needs, limitations and capacity. This requires self-discipline, commitment and self-observation. These qualities are as important as the sadhana itself, for they are its foundation.

Always remember that the sadhanas given here can be adapted for personal use. Contra-indications should be observed at all times. If necessary, the number of rounds can be reduced and gradually built up according to individual capacity and the time available.

Principles of practise

- Establish a regular time for practice. Ideally, hatha yoga is practised early in the morning.
- Practise on an empty stomach and after emptying the bowels. Before breakfast is the best time. Otherwise, allow three hours after meals, particularly before asana practice.
- Practise in a clean, well-ventilated room. The temperature should be comfortable.
- Use a yoga mat or a folded blanket. When sitting for pranayama, sit on a firm cushion so that the spine is supported and the hips are a little higher than the knees.

- Don't strain the body: allow flexibility, strength and lung capacity to gradually develop.
- Maintain awareness of the experience and effects of the practice at all times. This means not becoming involved with thoughts and distractions.
- During asana, carefully follow the instructions for breathing during the practice.
- Rest in shavasana or another relaxation posture as needed between the asanas and on completion of the asana component.

Capsules of yoga

The sadhanas are capsules of yoga to suit a variety of needs. Included are: general wellbeing, women's health, children over eight, teenagers, senior citizens, stress management and computer users.

GENERAL WELLBEING

These capsules include a basic routine which takes 20–30 minutes, and a longer and stronger routine which takes 45–60 minutes. In the 'Basic' capsule the asanas take the spine through its range of movement: traction, forward bending, backward bending, lateral stretch and twist; an inversion and relaxation asana complete the capsule. The asanas in 'Longer and Stronger' fulfil the same role as in the basic sadhana, but require greater flexibility and strength, and include a balancing pose.

How can hatha yoga be integrated into a busy life?

Swami Niranjanananda: To apply yoga in the home, in the daily routine, the use of capsules of yoga at different times of the day to attain relaxation, awareness and concentration is recommended. The hatha yoga capsules include asana, pranayama and shatkarma. In the morning before breakfast, asana and pranayama should be practised. This capsule takes about half an hour. On Saturday, some hatha yoga

shatkarmas, such as *neti*, *kapalbhati* and *trataka* should be performed.

To move the pranas and remove the blocks from the psychic centres and pranic centres in the body, practise the following asanas after the morning bath and before breakfast: *tadasana*, the palm tree pose, *tiryak tadasana*, the swaying palm tree pose, *kati chakrasana*, the waist rotation pose, *surya namaskara*, salute to the sun, and one inverted posture, such as *sarvangasana*, the shoulder stand. These asanas provide all the stretches the body needs to remove blocks from the pranic system and ensure the flow of energy through the body. These asanas take about 20 minutes to practice.

Just as cell phones must be recharged, there is a need to recharge the brain every morning, and this happens with the practise of pranayama. Two pranayamas are important. One is for regulation of the hormonal functions. For that, *bhramari* is efficient and effective. The other is to build up the capacity to breathe properly so that more of the vital forces from the environment can be absorbed. For that, *nadi shodhana* pranayama, known as alternate nostril breathing, is used. Incorporating a ratio of 1:1, that is, equal length inhalation and exhalation, will help energize the brain and provide inner clarity. These pranayamas take about 10 minutes to practise.

On Saturday, instead of the asanas and pranayamas, practise three of the shatkarmas: *neti*, nasal cleansing, *kapalbhati*, frontal brain cleansing, and *trataka*, steady gazing. *Laghoo shankhaprakshalana*, the short intestinal wash, and *kunjla*, regurgitative cleansing, are also an option.

This is a good way to apply hatha yoga in daily life. There are other capsules for bringing raja yoga, jnana yoga, mantra yoga and bhakti into one's life, but these are the hatha yoga capsules which can be followed at home.

Note: Instructions for the shatkarmas are not given in this book. These practices need to be learned from an experienced teacher.

BASIC

Asanas

Tadasana x 10
Tiryak tadasana x 10
Kati chakrasana x 10
Surya namaskara x 3
Shavasana
Vipareeta karani asana or sarvangasana x 1
Shavasana

Pranayama

Nadi shodhana 1:1 x 5 minutes
Bhramari x 10

Weekly

Shatkarma: jala neti, kapalbhati, trataka.
Optional: kunjla, laghoo shankhaprakshalana.

LONGER AND STRONGER

Asanas

Tadasana x 10
Tiryak tadasana x 10
Kati chakrasana x 10
Trikonasana variation 1 or 2 x 3
Eka padasana x 1
Surya namaskara x 3–12
Shavasana
Bhujangasana x 3
Shalabhasana x 3
Dhanurasana x 2
Paschimottanasana x 1
Sarvangasana x 1
Matsyasana x 1
Ardha matsyendrasana x 1

Pranayama

Bhastrika x 25 breaths x 5 rounds

Nadi Shodhana 1:2 or 1:1:1

Bhramari x 10

Weekly shatkarmas

Shatkarma: jala neti, kapalbhati, trataka

Optional: kunjla, laghoo shankhaprakshalana

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women lead demanding lives in which they have to fulfil a variety of roles at home and in the workplace. Fatigue, hormonal imbalance, and mental and emotional strain are commonplace. Women are often responsible for supporting the happiness and wellbeing of others, particularly within a family. To meet the needs of others, women's own needs must be taken care of. Hatha yoga is ideal for this purpose.

The women's health sadhana includes asanas to take the spine through its range of movement, to tone and strengthen the pelvic and reproductive area, and to open and expand the breathing area while taking tension out of the upper body. The pranayamas are for energizing, balancing and relaxing the nervous system. Shatkarmas include trataka at bedtime to clear the mind and ensure restful sleep. Weekly shatkarmas are for cleansing the internal body.

Why is it particularly important for women to practice asanas?

Swami Sivananda: Ladies should practise asanas. They will have healthy and strong children. If mothers are healthy and strong, children will be healthy and strong. Regeneration of young ladies means the regeneration of the whole world.

If ladies practise a course of asanas systematically with interest and attention, they will have wonderful health and vitality. There is no doubt about this. I hope they will give patient hearing to this earnest and sincere prayer, and start

practising these asanas from the very day they read these yogic lessons. Glory to these new yogic lady students who tread the path of yoga! Children born of yoginis will also be yogis.

How does a mother's yoga sadhana give the unborn child positive qualities?

Swami Niranjanananda: Each person receives their initial set of impressions from their mother in the deep unconscious within the womb. One is born with these impressions. Therefore, it is possible to learn the skills of life and to acquire wisdom while in the womb, provided the mother is disciplined, conscious and spiritually awakened.

It is only a spiritually awakened mother who is capable of imparting the right samskaras. With proper application of yogic practices by the mother, the child can be imbued with positive attitudes, samskaras and qualities while in the womb. She can become a conduit for the purity of the consciousness of the child.

SADHANA FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

Asanas

- Ardha or poorna titali asana x 5
- Chakki chalanasana x 5 each direction
- Namaskarasana x 5
- Majari-asana x 5
- Simhagarjanasana x 5
- Tadasana x 7
- Tiryak tadasana x 7 or trikonasana x 3
- Kati chakrasana x 5
- Surya namaskara x 3-12
- Shavasana
- Vipareeta karani asana x 1
- Shavasana
- Eka pada pranamasana x 1

Pranayama

Bhastrika x 15 breaths per round x 5 rounds

Nadi shodhana 1:2 x 5 minutes

Bhramari x 10 breaths

Bedtime

Shatkarma: trataka x 5 minutes

Weekly shatkarmas

Jala neti, kapalbhati

Laghoo/kunjla as required

CHILDREN

Children can benefit from yoga in many ways. From age eight, regular practice of a few simple asanas and pranayamas will improve coordination, memory, concentration, self-esteem, self-discipline and creativity. This is an important time for balancing and harmonizing both the physical systems of the body and the subtle energies in preparation for the transition into the teenage years.

What is the purpose of teaching yoga to children?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga is a process of self-training which leads to self-discovery. What is a human being? A human being has a body and a consciousness. A process of awareness is going on all the time. A process of evolution is being followed at all levels of existence and there are many factors to be worked out. The children being taught today will form tomorrow's culture. We have had our turn, now let us help the children understand the secrets of themselves and the mysteries of life. Using yoga as a remedy, let the minds of the restless youth be soothed by bringing more happiness and purpose into the field of education.

Imagine what would happen if yoga were taught in every school in the world, just as we teach mathematics or science! Young people everywhere would be well-adjusted, healthy

and happy. Everyone should invest in yoga, young and old. The future of young people and the whole world needs yoga.

Why should children be taught hatha yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Swami Sivananda used to say that a child is like a clay doll. Any shape can be given to the nature, the personality of that doll while it is wet. Once it dries, its shape cannot be altered at all. Therefore, it is essential that children imbibe positive samskaras. The doors of our mind and heart are closed, but that is not so with children. They must be given the opportunity to practice yoga.

Hatha yoga, most specifically asanas, are taught to children at the age of eight or nine. The practices of surya namaskara and pranayama are taught to children so that their body can condition itself right from the beginning to have balanced activity of the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. They will then grow up with balanced expression of their systems, balanced behaviour of *prana shakti*, the prana controlling the body, and *chitta shakti*, the prana controlling the mind.

How can young children be taught yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Children need not be told that they should practice yoga. Psychological experiments and a lot of observations have brought out this truth; that children imbibe everything from their parents, elders and friends. Not only children of eight, but even little babies of two imbibe. Even when the child is in the womb, he imbibes.

If the parents are doing yoga regularly, the children will practise on their own, and children are always guided by laws of nature. When that law permits them they will start practising yoga, either at the age of six, seven, eight or even ten.

What is the traditional system for introducing yoga to children?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to the yogic tradition, only the practice of surya namaskara is taught to a child

at the age of eight, and only that practice is done until the age of eleven. After that a few other asanas are included, but the actual yoga practice, according to tradition, begins after the child is fourteen. In the meantime, between the age of eight and eleven, only the practice of surya namaskara; then between eleven and fourteen, the practice of surya namaskara combined with trikonasana and three backward bending asanas (bhujangasana, shalabhasana and dhanurasana) until the age of fourteen. After that they can go into the practice of traditional asana.

By following this system, the physiological and hormonal growth, and the emotional balance in the body will be properly channelled. There will not be any imbalance. Of course, depending on the physical or mental condition of the child, there might be some other asana, or some other practice of hatha yoga incorporated, but as a general rule eight to eleven, eleven to fourteen, and onwards are the steps in teaching yoga to a child.

SADHANA FOR CHILDREN (AGE 8–11 YEARS)

Asanas

Surya namaskara
Shavasana
Bhujangasana
Shashankasana

Pranayama

Nadi shodhana with the natural breath
Bhramari

SADHANA FOR CHILDREN (AGE 12–14 YEARS)

Asanas

Surya namaskara
Shavasana
Shalabhasana

Bhujangasana
Dhanurasana
Trikonasana

Pranayama

Nadi shodhana with the natural breath
Bhramari

TEENAGERS

Adolescence is a time of great change, as the body, mind and identity mature. Hormonal imbalance can cause physical and emotional instability which the young person does not have the experience to understand or manage. The powerful effect of hatha yoga on the endocrine and nervous systems make it the perfect system for helping the body and mind to move smoothly through this time of transition.

Early adolescence is the ideal time to establish a regular yoga sadhana. The body and mind are highly receptive during this phase of life, maximizing the effectiveness of the practices and laying a solid foundation for the years to come. Flexibility of the muscles and joints is easily developed while young and can then be maintained. Healthy neuronal pathways can be established, so that responses to stress are appropriate and recovery from stress is faster due to the 'training' of the relaxation response (parasympathetic nervous system).

It will never be easier to positively influence all the systems of the body, including the pranic system, for both short and long-term benefits, than during the adolescent years.

Why should teenagers practise yoga sadhana?

Swami Sivananda: Sow the seed of spirituality when young. Do not waste the virya. Discipline the indriyas and mind. Do sadhana. Concentrate. Purify. Meditate. Serve. Love. Be kind

to all. Realize. If sadhana is practised when young, that person will be free from anxiety and fear of death, even in old age. It is very difficult to do any disciplined sadhana in old age. Therefore, one must be on the alert during one's teens.

SADHANA FOR TEENAGERS (FROM AGE 14)

Asanas

Poorna titali asana x 10
Tadasana x 10
Trikonasana 1 or 2 x 3
Saral natarajasana x 1
Surya namaskara x 12
Shavasana
Hasta pada angushthasana x 3
Dhanurasana with strong breathing so that the body rocks on the abdomen x 2
Paschimottanasana x 10–20 breaths
Shavasana
Ardha matsyendrasana x 1 x 10 breaths

Pranayama

Bhastrika x 25 breaths
Nadi shodhana 1:2 x 5 minutes; progress to 1:1:1 as capacity increases
Bhramari x 10

Weekly

Jala neti

SENIOR CITIZENS

Hatha yoga is renowned for keeping the body young. The classical texts repeatedly state that the various practices prevent old age and make one immortal. This can be taken to mean that hatha yoga is an ideal system for maintaining health and wellbeing during the later years.

Ideally, sadhana has been established during one's youth, continued through middle-age and into the senior years. The sadhana of such a person will be completely different to the sadhana of someone commencing yoga in later life. Even for those who take up yoga at this stage, there are many simple asanas, pranayamas and other practices of hatha yoga that can easily be learned and will keep the body supple, relaxed and energized.

Depending on one's constitution and lifestyle, from the age of fifty or sixty, conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes and bone and joint problems tend to increase. Simple yoga asanas and breathing practices are excellent for managing the health conditions associated with old age. The gentle, low-impact nature of yoga, combined with its holistic approach and broad-ranging benefits make it an ideal system for helping one to remain active, independent and productive during the senior years.

Are yoga practices only for the young?

Swami Sivananda: There is a general misconception that physical culture is only for the youth and that the more aged men and women should just helplessly watch old age set in. No. Middle-aged and older people benefit by regular practice of asanas and pranayama.

Can yoga be practised at any age?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yes, you can practise yoga at any age whether it be 10, 20, 40, 60 or 80, because the practices begin gradually and are simple enough to exercise the different parts of the entire body. It is not necessary to practise advanced yoga like headstand or performing intricate contortions. Asana is a practice through which one attains awareness of the body, releases tension and stress from different joints and muscles, and comes to a state of relaxation in which there is physical comfort in the general activities of life.

SADHANA FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Asanas

- Majari-asana x 5
- Pawanmuktasana part one (at least one movement for each joint)
- Shavasana
- Supta udarakarshanasana x 5
- Tadasana x 5
- Tiryak tadasana x 5
- Dwikonasana x 3
- Bandha hasta utthanasana x 5
- Makarasana x 1

Pranayama

- Full yogic breath 1:1 x 10
- Nadi shodhana 1:1 x 5 minutes
- Bhramari x 10

Weekly

- Jala neti

STRESS MANAGEMENT

High pressure lifestyles are commonplace in modern society, leading to many stress-related physical and mental health problems. The body's response to stress affects all the physical systems, as the sympathetic nervous system sends messages which are intended to help deal with a serious threat or emergency i.e. a temporary situation. When the stress is ongoing, the emergency response can begin to dominate the body; relaxation becomes impossible and the quality of life suffers.

To balance this highly externalized, over-stimulated way of living, it is essential to learn how to relax fully. This means releasing tension and toxins from the muscles, joints and internal body, breathing slowly and deeply to activate the

relaxation response, and managing the mind by being able to let go of intrusive thoughts and feelings. Hatha yoga, in combination with yoga nidra and meditation, provides the tools to de-stress in this way. With regular practise, yoga retrains the nervous system so that the relaxation response (parasympathetic nervous system) becomes strong, reducing the impact of stress on the body-mind.

How can stress be managed by lifestyle?

Swami Sivananda: If there is mental fatigue in students due to too much strain and study, if there is mental fatigue in merchants on account of business worries, if there is fatigue in officers on account of overwork, they should take proper rest at once. They should go to the hills or the seaside for a change. They should do pranayama and take a light, wholesome, nutritious diet. They should do japa and kirtan vigorously and practise easy asanas.

What is the role of asana and pranayama in managing stress?

Swami Satyananda: Tensions are physical, mental and emotional. Unbalanced hormonal secretions due to faulty living, faulty breathing and other factors can cause tensions. They are not necessarily due to the psychological problems of society or the emotional maladjustment of the family; there can also be nervous disorders and other physiological problems.

Therefore, in yoga, asana and pranayama come first in order to get rid of muscular and physical tensions, to eliminate toxins from the body and to balance the hormonal secretions. For instance, over and under secretion of the pituitary hormones, the sexual hormones, adrenalin and thyroxin, all have a great influence on behaviour and thinking.

These tensions which cause so much trouble and which exclude the experience of peace from daily life can be solved by the practices of hatha yoga. People think that asana and pranayama are just exercises, but they are not and should not be practised as such. They should be performed with great care.

How can one learn to deal with any kind of stress that occurs in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: If the practices of asana, pranayama, relaxation, yoga nidra and the two practices of concentration, trataka and ajapa japa, are incorporated into one's routine, the ability to manage each and every kind of stress in the world is possible. The ability to maintain health in the most adverse conditions can be developed. The strength to experience one's inner power in the most demanding situations the world can throw at you will arise. That is the application of yoga in one's life.

SADHANA FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

Note: all asanas to be performed slowly, consciously and with awareness of every breath in and out. Breathing should be as deep and slow as possible.

Asanas

Pawanmuktasana part one (at least one movement for each joint)

Shavasana

Supta udarakarshanasana x 3

Majari-asana x 5

Shashankasana (static)

Simhagarjanasana x 5

Tadasana x 7

Tiryak tadasana x 7

Bandha hasta utthanasana x 5

Makarasana

Advasana

Pranayama

Abdominal breathing or full yogic breathing; option – with ujjayi

Nadi shodhana 1:1 or 1:2 x 5 minutes

Bhramari x 5 minutes

Throughout the day

Observe the pattern of breathing. Whenever it seems to be quite fast and shallow practise 5-10 abdominal or full yogic breaths. If there is a stressful situation, try to practise abdominal or full yogic breathing and/or ujjayi. If there are feelings of panic, practise bhrumari. Use shashankasana to help still the mind if thoughts become overwhelming.

End of the day

Yoga nidra (use a recording)

Note: yoga nidra is not a hatha yoga practice but is important for stress management.

Bedtime

Shatkarma: Trataka x 5 minutes

Going to sleep

Shavasana with awareness of the natural breath, or with slow abdominal breathing.

Weekly shatkarma

Jala neti

COMPUTER USERS

Prolonged computer use is detrimental to the body but modern living often requires it. Good ergonomics, correct posture and regular stretching prevent and help manage computer related injuries such as stiff neck, repetitive strain injury and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Attention needs to be given to the ergonomics of the workstation and to the posture while sitting at the desk. The position and way of using the mouse should minimize tension in the shoulder, arm and wrist; the elbows need to be tucked in close to the body with the forearm at a right angle

i.e. the desk or pull-out keyboard tray at elbow height. The wrists and hands should be flat and the mouse kept close so that the arm is not stretched out to the side. The height of the screen should be at eye level to protect the neck from strain. The head, neck and spine need to be straight and upright with the thighs and knees forming right angles, and the feet flat on the floor. If sitting on the floor at a low table, sit on a cushion and follow the above guidelines for the upper body. Alternatively, it may be comfortable to sit cross-legged on a chair.

For prolonged work at a laptop, sit the laptop on a stand or pile of books so that it is at eye level and use a plug in or wireless mouse and keyboard.

Yoga asanas are the ideal way of counteracting the effects of computer use on the body. To be most effective, they need to be practised as a sadhana at home and also as needed while at the desk. The following yoga sadhana is for practising first thing in the morning. It focuses on taking the joints and spine through their range of movement, energizing the body with dynamic asanas, and providing a powerful expansion to both the front and back of the upper body by performing gomukhasana followed by the upper body position for garudasana. Most of the listed asanas can be adapted for use while at the desk. Additionally, it is beneficial to practise some asanas at the end of the day to remove accumulated tension before sleeping.

Many people in sedentary jobs develop shallow breathing patterns due to posture, lack of aerobic exercise and excessive mental work. Yogic breathing techniques and pranayama help correct and strengthen the breath, energizing the physical body and the brain. Abdominal and full yogic breathing can be practised occasionally whilst sitting at the desk to oxygenate the body and stimulate the nervous system.

SADHANA FOR COMPUTER USERS

Asanas

Pawanmuktasana part one (at least one movement for each joint)

Shavasana

Chakki chalanasana x 5–10

Tadasana x 10

Tiryak tadasana x 10

Kati chakrasana x 10

Bandha hasta utthanasana x 5

Surya namaskara x 3

Shavasana

Vipareeta karani asana x 1

Gomukhasana x 1

Maintaining the base position for gomukhasana, position the arms as for garudasana x 1

Shashankasana (static)

Pranayama

Abdominal or full yogic breathing x 15

Nadi shodhana 1:1 x 5 minutes

Bhramari x 10

Weekly

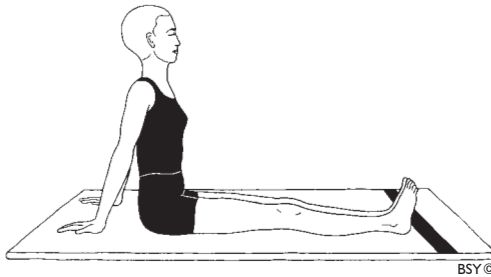
Jala neti

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Practice Instructions

ASANA

PAWANMUKTASANA PART ONE



Prarambhik Sthiti (base position)

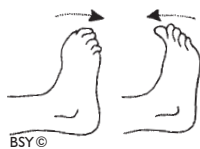
Sit with the legs outstretched, feet close together but not touching.

Place the palms of the hands on the floor to the sides, just behind the buttocks.

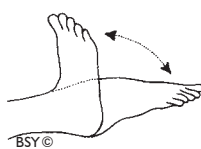
The back, neck and head should be comfortably straight. Straighten the elbows.

Lean back slightly, taking the support of the arms.

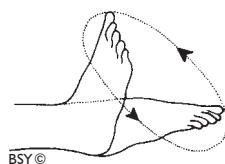
Close the eyes and relax the whole body in this position.



Practice 1



Practice 2



Practice 3

Practice 1: Padanguli Naman (toe bending)

Sit in the base position with the legs outstretched and the feet together. Place the hands beside and slightly behind the buttocks.

Lean back a little, using the arms to support the back.

Keep the spine straight.

Be aware of the toes. Move only the toes of both feet slowly backward and forward, keeping the feet upright and the ankles relaxed and motionless.

Hold each position for a few seconds.

Repeat 10 times.

Breathing: Inhale as the toes move backward.

Exhale as the toes move forward.

Awareness: On the stretching produced by the movement and the breath.

Practice 2: Goolf Naman (ankle bending)

Remain in the base position.

Slowly move both feet backward and forward, bending them from the ankle joints. Try to stretch the feet forward to touch the floor and then draw them back towards the knees. Hold each position for a few seconds.

Repeat 10 times.

Breathing: Inhale as the feet move backward.

Exhale as the feet move forward.

Awareness: On the stretch in the foot, ankle, calf and leg, and the breath.

Practice 3: Goolf Chakra (ankle rotation)

Remain in the base position.

Keep the legs shoulder-width apart and straight.

Keep the heels on the ground throughout the practice.

Stage 1: Slowly rotate the right foot clockwise from the ankle 10 times and then repeat 10 times anti-clockwise.

Repeat the same procedure with the left foot.

Stage 2: Slowly rotate both feet together in the same direction.

Focus on rotating the feet and not the knees.

Practise 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise.

Stage 3: Keep the feet separated.

Slowly rotate both feet from the ankles together, but in opposite directions.

Do 10 rotations in one direction and then 10 rotations in the opposite direction.

Breathing: Inhale on the upward movement.

Exhale on the downward movement.

Awareness: On the rotation of the ankle and the breath.



Practice 4: Goolf Ghoornan (ankle crank)

Remain in the base position.

Bend the right knee and bring the foot towards the groin. Turn the knee out to the side and if there is no strain, gently place the foot on the left thigh.

Make sure the ankle is far enough over the thigh to be free for rotation.

Hold the right ankle with the right hand.

Hold the toes of the right foot with the left hand.

With the aid of the left hand, slowly rotate the right foot 10 times clockwise, then 10 times anti-clockwise.

Change the leg and repeat with the left foot placed on the right thigh.

Breathing: Inhale on the upward movement.

Exhale on the downward movement.

Awareness: On the rotation and the breath.

Practice 5: Janufalak Akarshan (kneecap contraction)

Stay in the base position.

Gently contract the muscle surrounding the right knee, drawing the kneecap back towards the thigh.

Hold the contraction for 3 to 5 seconds, counting mentally.

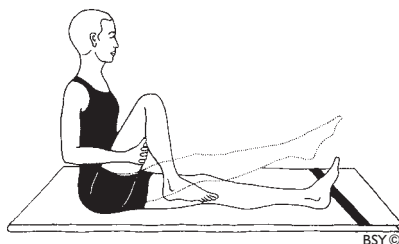
Release the contraction and let the kneecap return to its normal position.

Practise 10 times. Repeat with the left kneecap 10 times, then with both kneecaps together.

Breathing: Inhale while contracting.

Exhale while relaxing the knee muscles.

Awareness: On the contraction and the breath.



Practice 6: Janu Naman (knee bending)

Stage I: Stay in the base position. Bend the right knee, bringing the thigh near the chest and clasp the hands under the right thigh.

Straighten the right leg, pulling up the kneecap.
Keep the hands under the thigh, but straighten the arms.
Keep the heel about 10 cms off the floor.
Again bend the right knee so that the thigh comes close to the chest and the heel near the groin.
Keep the head and spine straight.
This is one round.
Practise 10 rounds with the right leg and then 10 rounds with the left leg.

Stage 2: Bend both knees together, bringing the thighs near the chest and place the feet on the floor in front of the groin.

Hold the backs of the thighs.

Raise the feet slightly from the floor and balance on the buttocks.

Straighten the legs as much as you can without straining.
The arms straighten naturally while the hands continue to support the thighs.

Point the toes forward.

The hands and arms should support and maintain the stability of the body. Keep the head and spine upright.

Remain in the position for a few seconds.

Bend the knees and bring the legs back to the starting position, keeping the heels slightly above the floor.

Draw the toes back towards the shins.

This is one round.

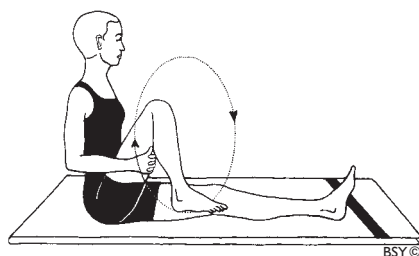
Practise 5 to 10 rounds, keeping the heels off the floor throughout the practice.

Breathing: Inhale while straightening the legs.

Exhale while bending the legs.

Awareness: On the knee bend and associated movement and balance, and the breath.

Contra-indications: Stage 2 is a strenuous practice and should not be attempted by people with weak abdominal muscles, back conditions, high blood pressure or heart conditions.



Practice 7: Janu Chakra (knee crank)

Sit in the base position.

Bend the right knee and bring the thigh near the chest. Place the hands under the right thigh and interlock the fingers or cross the arms holding the elbows.

Raise the right foot from the ground.

Rotate the lower leg from the knee in a large circular movement; try to straighten the leg at the top of the upward movement.

The upper leg and trunk should be completely still.

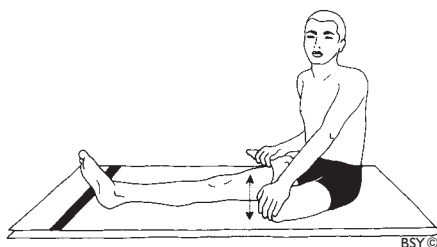
Rotate 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise.

Repeat with the left leg.

Breathing: Inhale on the upward movement.

Exhale on the downward movement.

Awareness: On the movement and perfection of circular rotation, and the breath.



Practice 8: Ardha Titali Asana (half butterfly)

Sit in the base position.

Bend the right leg and place the right foot comfortably on the left thigh.

Place the right hand on top of the bent right knee.

Hold the toes of the right foot with the left hand.

This is the starting position.

Stage 1: with breath synchronization

While breathing in, gently move the right knee up towards the chest. Breathing out, gently push the knee down and try to touch the knee to the floor.

The trunk should not move.

Do not force this movement in any way.

The leg muscles should be passive, the movement being achieved by the exertion of the right arm.

Slowly practise 10 up and down movements.

Awareness: On the movement of the knee, ankle and hip joints, relaxation of the inner thigh muscles, and the breath.

Stage 2: without breath synchronization

Remain in the same position with the right leg on the left thigh.

Relax the right leg muscles as much as possible.

Push the right knee down with the right hand and try to touch the knee to the floor.

Do not strain.

Let the knee spring up by itself.

The movement is achieved by use of the right arm only.

Practise 30 up and down movements in quick succession.

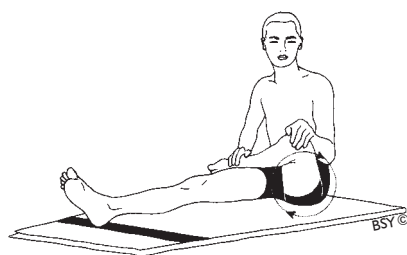
Breathing should be normal and unrelated to the practice.

Repeat stages 1 and 2 and the unlocking procedure (see note below) with the left leg.

Awareness: On the movement of the knee, ankle and hip joints and relaxation of the inner thigh muscles.

Practice note: Gently straighten the leg after completing the practice, then again slowly and carefully bend it once, bringing the heel near the groin, then stretch the leg out fully in front.

This procedure will ensure that the knee joint is realigned correctly.



Practice 9: Shroni Chakra (hip rotation)

Sit in the same starting position as for ardha titali asana with the right foot on the left thigh.

Use the right hand to rotate the right knee in a circle and make the circular movement as large as possible.

The index finger may be pointed out and used as a guide to perfection of the circular movement.

Practise 10 rotations clockwise and then 10 rotations anti-clockwise.

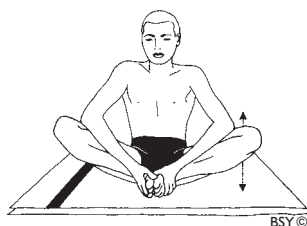
Straighten the leg slowly.

Repeat with the left leg.

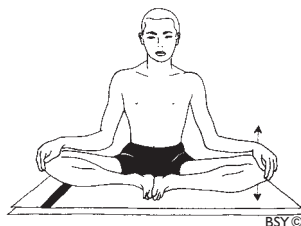
Breathing: Inhale on the upward movement.

Exhale on the downward movement.

Awareness: On the rotation of the knee, ankle and hip joint, and the breath.



Stage 1



Stage 2

Practice 10: Poorna Titali Asana (full butterfly)

Sit in the base position.

Bend the knees and bring the soles of the feet together, keeping the heels as close to the perineum as possible.

Fully relax the inner thigh muscles.

Stage 1: Clasp the feet with both hands.

Gently move the knees up and then down towards the floor, but do not use any force.

Practise up to 30 up and down movements.

Stage 2: Keep the soles of the feet together.

Place the hands on the knees.

Using the hands, gently push the knees down towards the floor, allowing them to spring up again.

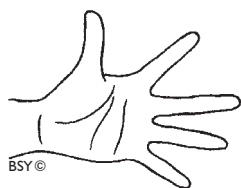
Do not force this movement.

Repeat 10 to 30 times. Straighten the legs and relax.

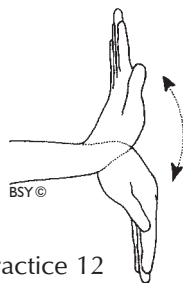
Breathing: Normal breathing, unrelated to the practice.

Awareness: On the hip joint, movement and relaxation.

Contra-indications: People with sciatica and sacral conditions should avoid this asana.



Practice 11



Practice 12

Practice 11: Mushtika Bandhana (hand clenching)

Sit in the base position or a cross-legged pose.

Hold both arms straight in front of the body at shoulder level.

Open the hands, palms down, and stretch the fingers as wide apart as possible.

Close the fingers to make a tight fist with the thumbs inside.

The fingers should be slowly wrapped around the thumbs.

Again open the hands and stretch the fingers.

Repeat 10 times.

Breathing: Inhale on opening the hands.

Exhale on closing the hands.

Awareness: On the stretching sensation and movement, and the breath.

Practice 12: Manibandha Naman (wrist bending)

Remain in the base position or a cross-legged pose.

Stretch the arms in front of the body at shoulder level.

Keep the palms open and fingers straight throughout the entire practice.

Bend the hands backward from the wrists as if pressing the palms against a wall with the fingers pointing toward the ceiling.

Bend the hands forward from the wrists so that the fingers point toward the floor.

Keep the elbows straight throughout the practice.

Do not bend the knuckle joints or fingers.

Bend the hands up again for the next round.

Repeat 10 times.

Breathing: Inhale with the backward movement.

Exhale with the forward movement.

Awareness: On the movement in the wrist joint and stretching of the forearm muscles, and the breath.

Practice 13: Manibandha Chakra (wrist joint rotation)

Remain in the base position or a comfortable cross-legged pose, but keep the back straight.

Stage I: Extend the right arm forward at shoulder level.

Make a loose fist with the right hand, with the thumb inside.

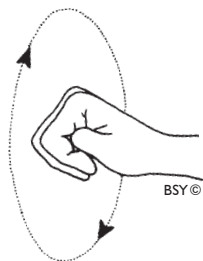
This is the starting position.

Slowly rotate the fist about the wrist, ensuring that the fist faces downward throughout the rotation.

The arms and elbows should remain perfectly straight and still. Make as large a circle as possible.

Practise 10 times clockwise and 10 times anti-clockwise.

Repeat the same with the left fist.



Stage 2: Extend both arms in front of the body with the fists loosely clenched.

Keep the arms straight and at shoulder level.

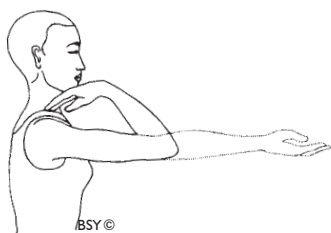
Rotate the fists together in the same direction.

Practise 10 times in each direction.

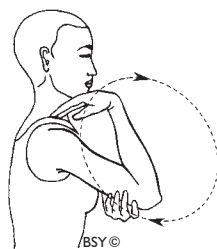
Stage 3: Practise as in stage 2.

Rotate the fists in opposite directions.

Practise 10 times in each direction.



Practice 14



Practice 15

Practice 14: Kehuni Naman (elbow bending)

Stage 1: Remain in the base position or a cross-legged pose.

Stretch the arms in front of the body at shoulder level.

The hands should be open with the palms facing up.

Bend the arms at the elbows and touch the fingers to the shoulders. Keep the upper arm parallel to the floor.

Straighten the arms again.

This is one round.

Repeat 10 times.

Stage 2: Extend the arms sideways at shoulder level, hands open and palms facing the ceiling.

Bend the arms at the elbows and touch the fingers to the shoulders. Keep the upper arms parallel to the floor.

Again straighten the arms sideways.

Repeat 10 times.

Breathing: Inhale while straightening the arms.

Exhale while bending the arms.

Awareness: On the movement of the elbow joint and arm muscles, and the breath.

Practice 15: Kehuni Chakra (elbow rotation)

Remain in the base position or a cross-legged pose.

Stretch the right arm in front of the body at shoulder level.

The right hand can be open, or loosely closed.

Support the right upper arm with the left hand.

Bend the right arm at the elbow, rotating the elbow joint so that the lower arm and hand move clockwise.

Keep the upper arm steady and parallel to the floor.

The movement should be smooth. The fingers should almost touch the right shoulder as they move past.

Practise slowly 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise.

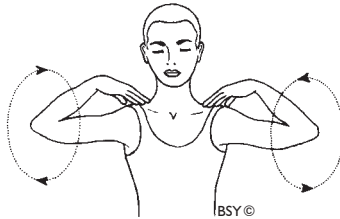
Gently lower the right arm.

Repeat on the other side.

Breathing: Inhale on the upward stroke.

Exhale on the downward stroke.

Awareness: On the rotation of the elbow joint with the breath and on keeping the upper arm steady.



Practice 16: Skandha Chakra (shoulder socket rotation)

Stage I: Remain in the base position or a cross-legged pose.

Place the fingers of the right hand on the right shoulder.

Keep the left hand on the left knee and the back straight.

Rotate the right elbow in a large circle.

Practise 10 times clockwise and 10 times anti-clockwise.

Repeat with the left elbow.

Make sure that the head, trunk and spine remain straight and still.

Stage 2: Place the fingers of the left hand on the left shoulder and the fingers of the right hand on the right shoulder.

Fully rotate both elbows at the same time in a large circle.

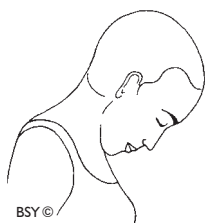
Try to touch the elbows in front of the chest on the forward movement and touch the ears while moving up. Stretch the arms back in the backward movement and touch the sides of the trunk while coming down.

Practise slowly 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise.

Breathing: Inhale on the upward stroke.

Exhale on the downward stroke.

Awareness: On the stretching sensation around the shoulder joint and the breath.



Stage 1



Stage 2

Practice 17: Greeva Sanchalana (neck movements)

Stage I: Sit in a cross-legged pose with the hands resting on the knees in jnana or chin mudra. Close the eyes.

Slowly move the head forward and try to touch the chin to the chest.

Move the head as far back as is comfortable. Do not strain.

Feel the stretch of the muscles in the front and back of the neck, and the loosening of the vertebrae in the neck.

Practise 10 times.

Breathing: Inhale on the backward movement.

Exhale on the forward movement.

Stage 2: Remain in the same position, keeping the eyes closed.

Face directly forward.

Relax the shoulders.

Slowly move the head to the right, bringing the right ear close to the right shoulder without raising the shoulders.

Move the head to the left side and bring the left ear close to the left shoulder.

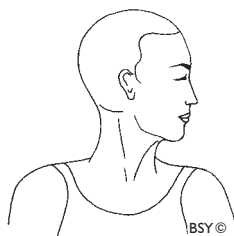
Do not strain; touching the shoulder is not necessary.

This is one round. Practise 10 rounds.

Breathing: Inhale on the upward movement.

Exhale on the downward movement.

Awareness: On the stretching sensation of the muscles in the sides of the neck, and the breath.



Stage 3



Stage 4

Stage 3: Remain in the same sitting position.

Keep the head upright and the eyes closed.

Gently turn the head to the right so that the chin is in line with the right shoulder.

Feel the release of tension in the neck muscles and the loosening of the neck joints.

Slowly turn the head to the left as far as is comfortable.

Do not strain.

Practise 10 times on each side.

Breathing: Inhale while turning to the front.

Exhale while turning to the side.

Stage 4: Remain in the same position with the eyes closed.

Slowly rotate the head downward, to the right, backward

and then to the left side in a relaxed, smooth, rhythmic, circular movement.

Feel the shifting stretch around the neck and the loosening up of the joints and muscles of the neck.

Practise 10 times clockwise and then 10 times anti-clockwise.

Do not strain.

If dizziness occurs, open the eyes and discontinue the practice for that day.

After the practice, keep the neck straight and the eyes closed. Be aware of the sensations in the head and neck.

Breathing: Inhale as the head moves up.

Exhale as the head moves down.

Awareness: On the movement and the breath.

Contra-indications: These four neck movements should not be performed by elderly people and those suffering from low blood pressure, high blood pressure, vertigo or extreme cervical spondylosis. Expert advice should be sought for any of these problems. Cervical spondylosis patients should strictly avoid forward bending of the neck.

SUPTA UDARAKARSHANASANA (Sleeping abdominal stretch pose)



Technique

Lie in the starting position and relax.

Bend the knees and place the soles of both feet flat on the floor, directly in front of the buttocks.

Keep the knees and feet together throughout the practice. Interlock the fingers of both hands, place the palms under the back of the head and let the elbows touch the floor.

Breathe in, and while breathing out, slowly lower the legs to the right, trying to bring the knees down to the floor. The feet should remain in contact with each other, although the left foot will move slightly off the floor. At the same time, gently turn the head and neck in the opposite direction to the legs. This will give a uniform twisting stretch to the entire spine. Hold the breath in the final position while mentally counting three seconds. While breathing in, raise both legs to the upright position.

Keep the shoulders and elbows on the floor throughout. Repeat on the left side to complete one round.

Practise 5 complete rounds.

Variation: Bend the knees and bring the thighs up to the chest. Interlock the fingers and place them behind the head. Roll the body from side to side, keeping the elbows on the floor.

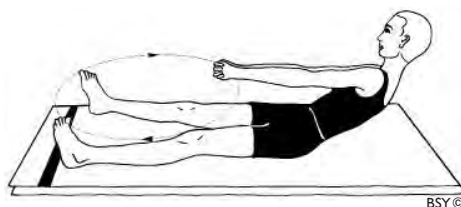
Breathing: Exhale while lowering the legs to the sides.

Hold the breath in the final position.

Inhale while raising the legs.

Awareness: On the twisting stretch of the paraspinal and abdominal muscles, and the breath.

CHAKKI CHALANASANA (churning the mill)



Technique

Sit with the legs stretched out in front of the body with the feet widely separated. Interlock the fingers of both hands and hold the arms out straight in front of the chest.

Keep the arms straight and horizontal throughout the practice; do not bend the elbows.

Bend forward as far as possible without straining. Imagine the action of churning a mill with an old-fashioned stone grinder.

Swivel to the right so that the hands pass above the right toes and as far to the right as possible without straining. Lean back as far as possible on the backward swing.

Try to move the body from the waist. On the forward swing, bring the arms and hands to the left side, over the left toes and then back to the centre position.

One rotation is one round.

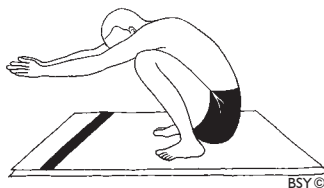
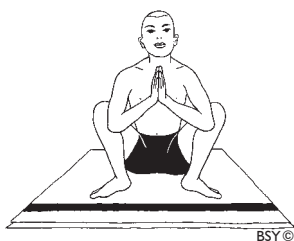
Practise 5 to 10 rounds clockwise and then the same number of rounds anti-clockwise.

Breathing: Inhale while leaning back.

Exhale while moving forward.

Awareness: On the movement and sensations in the lower back, hips and pelvic area, and the breath.

NAMASKARASANA (salutation pose)



Technique

Squat with the feet flat on the floor about 60 cm apart. The knees should be wide apart and the elbows pressing against the insides of the knees.

Bring the hands together in front of the chest in a gesture of prayer.

This is the starting position.

The eyes may be open or closed.

Inhale and bend the head backwards. Feel the pressure at the back of the neck.

Simultaneously, use the elbows to push the knees as wide apart as comfortable.

Hold this position for 3 seconds while retaining the breath.

Exhale and straighten the arms directly in front of the body.

At the same time, push in with the knees, pressing the upper arms inward.

The head should be bent forward with the chin pressed against the chest.

Hold this position, retaining the breath, for 3 seconds.

Return to the starting position.

This is one round.

Practise 5 to 10 rounds.

Breathing: Inhale while bringing the palms together in front of the chest.

Exhale while extending the arms forward.

Awareness: On the stretch in the groin and compression at the back of the neck, then changing to relaxation of the upper back and shoulder muscles in the forward position, and the breath.

Contra-indications: Not for people with knee problems or sciatica.

TADASANA (palm tree pose)

Technique

Stand with the feet together or about 10 cm apart, and the arms by the sides.

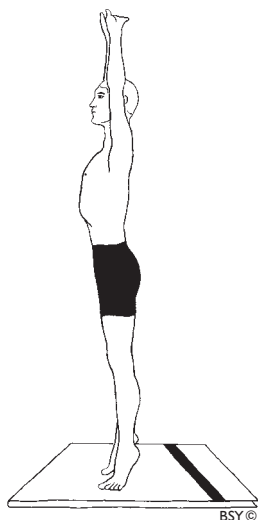
Steady the body and distribute the weight equally on both feet.

Raise the arms over the head.

Interlock the fingers and turn the palms upward.

Place the hands on top of the head.

Fix the eyes at a point on the wall slightly above the level of the head.



The eyes should remain fixed on this point throughout the practice.

Inhale and stretch the arms, shoulders and chest upward. Raise the heels, coming up on to the toes. Stretch the whole body from top to bottom, without losing balance or moving the feet.

Hold the breath and the position for a few seconds.

At first it may be difficult to maintain balance, but with practice it becomes easier.

Lower the heels while breathing out and bring the hands to the top of the head.

This is one round.

Relax for a few seconds before performing the next round.

Practise 10 rounds.

Breathing: Inhale while raising the arms, retain or breathe normally in the stretch, and exhale while lowering the arms.

Awareness: Physical– on the stretch of the whole body from top to bottom, and on maintaining balance and on the breath.

TIRYAK TADASANA (swaying palm tree pose)

Technique

Stand with the feet more than shoulder width apart.

Fix the gaze on a point directly in front.

Interlock the fingers and turn the palms outward.

Raise the arms over the head, stretching upwards.

Bend to the right side from the waist.

Do not bend forward or backward or twist the trunk.

Hold the position for a few seconds, then slowly come back to the upright position.

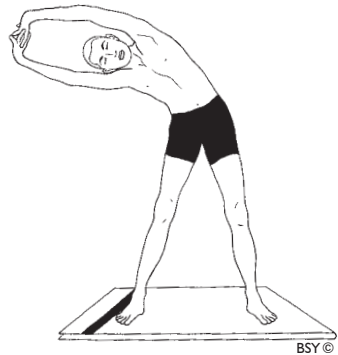
Repeat on the left side. This completes one round.

Practise 10 rounds.

To end the practice, return to the upright position, release the hands, bringing the arms down to the sides.

Breathing: Inhale raising the arms, exhale while bending to the side, inhale to centre. Exhale while releasing the posture.

Awareness: Physical – on keeping the balance and the stretch along the side of the body. On keeping the body and head facing forward while bending to the sides without twisting. On the breath synchronized with the movement.



KATI CHAKRASANA (waist rotating pose)

Technique

Stand with the feet about shoulder width apart and the arms by the sides.

Raise the arms to shoulder level, then twist the body to the right.

Bring the left hand to the right shoulder and wrap the right arm around the back, bringing the right hand around the left side of the waist. Look over the right shoulder as far as is comfortable.

Keep the back of the neck straight and imagine the top of the spine is the fixed point around which the head turns.

Hold for two seconds, accentuate the twist, gently stretching the abdomen.



Return to the starting position.

Repeat on the other side to complete one round.

Keep the feet firmly on the ground while twisting.

Relax the arms and back as much as possible throughout the practice. Do not strain. The movement should be relaxed and spontaneous.

Perform the rotation smoothly, without jerking or stiffness.

Practise 5 to 10 rounds.

Breathing: Inhale raising the arms.

Exhale twisting to the side.

Inhale returning to the centre.

Exhale while releasing the posture.

Awareness: On the stretch of the abdomen and spinal muscles, and on the breathing synchronized with the movement.

Practice note: This asana may be performed in a more dynamic way by swinging rhythmically with the arms, without synchronizing the movements with the breath.

TRIKONASANA (triangle pose)

Technique

Variation I: Stand erect with the feet more than shoulder width apart. Turn the right foot to the right side.

Stretch the arms sideways and raise them to shoulder level so that they are in one straight line.

Bend to the right, taking care not to bring the body forward. Simultaneously bend the right knee slightly.

Place the right hand on the right foot, keeping the two arms in line with each other. Turn the left palm forward.

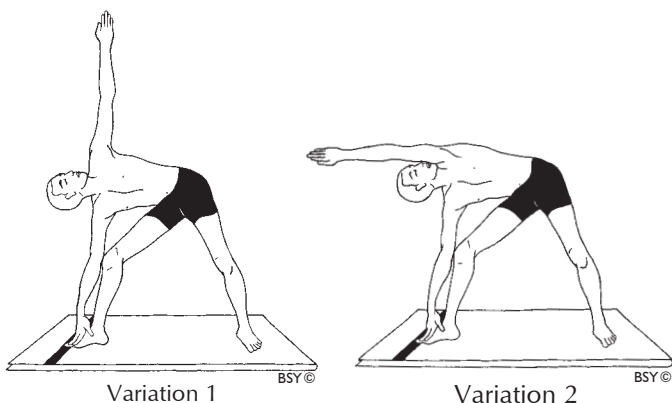
Look up at the left hand in the final position.

Return to the upright position with the arms in a straight line.

Repeat on the other side, bending the left knee slightly.

This completes one round.

Practise 5 to 10 rounds.



Breathing: Inhale while raising the arms. Exhale while bending.

Hold the breath for a few seconds in the final position.

Inhale while raising the body to the vertical position.

Awareness: On the stretch along the side of the trunk, legs and arms, on keeping the balance, and on coordinating the movement with the breath.

Variation 2: Repeat the basic form, but instead of keeping the upper arm vertical in the final position, lower it over the ear until it is parallel to the floor with the palm facing down. Try not to bend forward, but to keep the body in one vertical plane. Look up at the hand.

Slowly return to the starting position.

Practise 5 to 10 rounds.

DWIKONASANA (double angle pose)

Technique

Stand erect with the feet 30 cm apart.

Extend the arms behind the back and interlock the fingers. This is the starting position.

Bend forward from the hips so that the back and face are parallel with the floor.

Raise the arms behind the back as high as possible

without strain. The arms act as a lever and accentuate the stretch given to the shoulders and chest.

Remain in the final position for a short time, lower the arms to the back, and then return to the upright position.

Repeat up to 10 times.

Breathing: Inhale while standing erect.

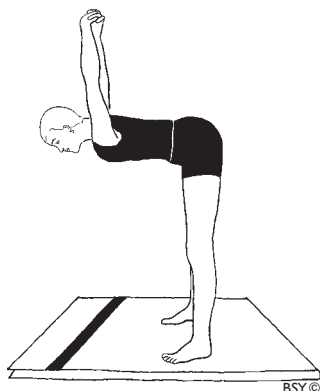
Exhale while bending forward.

Inhale while raising the arms.

Exhale while lowering the arms.

Inhale while returning to the upright position.

Awareness: Physical – on the stretch of the arms, shoulders and upper back, on keeping the back straight and parallel to the floor, and on synchronizing the movement with the breath.



BANDHA HASTA UTTHANASANA (locked hand raising pose)

Technique

Stand erect with the feet together and the arms by the sides. Relax the whole body and balance the body weight equally on both feet.

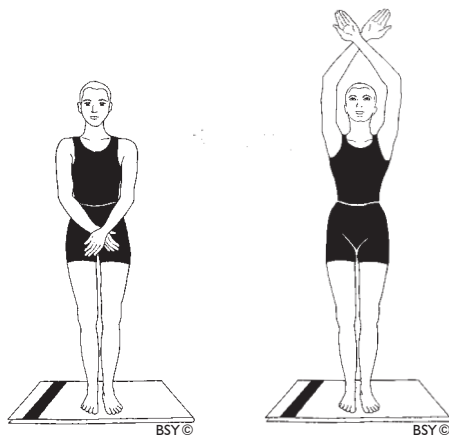
Cross the wrists in front of the body.

Slowly raise the arms above the head, keeping the wrists crossed, and at the same time bend the head slightly backward and look up at the hands.

Spread the arms out to the sides so that they form a straight line at shoulder level.

Hold the position, then reverse the movement, re-crossing the wrists above the head.

Lower the arms straight down so that they are once



again in the starting position, and look forward.

Repeat the process 10 times.

Breathing: For beginners – inhale raising the arms, exhale while spreading them out to the sides, inhale while re-crossing the wrists above the head, and exhale while lowering the arms.

For more experienced practitioners – inhale while raising the arms and inhale more deeply while spreading them out to the sides. Exhale while re-crossing the wrists above the head and exhale more deeply while lowering the arms.

Awareness: On the stretch in the arms and shoulders, the expansion of the lungs, and on the breath synchronized with the movement.

SURYA NAMASKARA (salutations to the sun)

Position I: Pranamasana (prayer pose)

Keep the eyes closed.

Remain standing upright with the feet together.

Slowly bend the elbows and place the palms together in front of the chest in namaskara mudra, mentally offering homage to the sun, the source of all life.

Relax the whole body.

Breathing: Breathe normally.

Awareness: Physical – on the chest area.

Position 2: Hasta Utthanasana (raised arms pose)

Separate the hands, raise and stretch both arms above the head, keeping them shoulder width apart.

Bend the head, arms and upper trunk slightly backward.

Breathing: Inhale while raising the arms.

Awareness: Physical – on the stretch of the abdomen and expansion of the lungs.

Position 3: Padahastasana (hand to foot pose)

Bend forward from the hips until the fingers or palms of the hands touch the floor on either side of the feet.

Bring the forehead as close to the knees as is comfortable.

Do not strain.

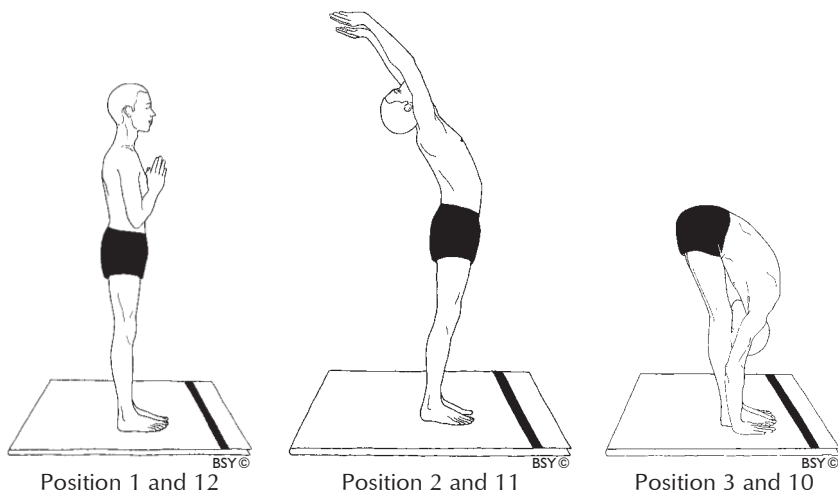
Keep the knees straight.

Breathing: Exhale while bending forward.

Contract the abdomen in the final position to expel the maximum amount of air from the lungs.

Awareness: Physical – on the back and pelvic region.

Contra-indications: People with back conditions should not bend forward fully. Bend from the hips, keeping the spine straight, until the back forms a ninety degree



angle with the legs, or bend only as far as is comfortable. Cautions for inverted postures apply.

Position 4: Ashwa Sanchalanasana (equestrian pose)

Place the hands on the floor beside the feet.

Stretch the right leg back as far as is comfortable and grasp the floor with the toes.

At the same time, bend the left knee, keeping the left foot on the floor in the same position. Keep the arms straight. In the final position, the weight of the body should be supported on both hands, the left foot, right knee and toes of the right foot. The head should be tilted backward, the back arched and the inner gaze directed upward to the eyebrow centre.

Breathing: Inhale while stretching the right leg back.

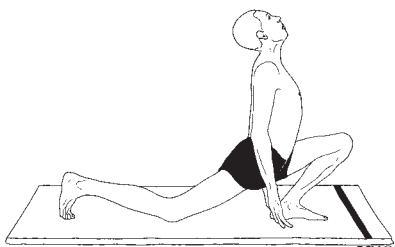
Awareness: Physical – on the stretch from the thigh through the lower back, and on the eyebrow centre while balancing.

Contra-indications: The full stretch is not advised for people with knee or ankle problems.

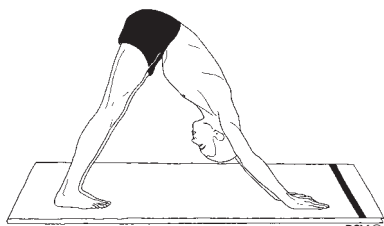
Position 5: Parvatasana (mountain pose)

Keep the hands and right foot still, and take the left foot back beside the right foot. Simultaneously, raise the buttocks and lower the head between the arms so that the back and legs form two sides of a triangle.

The legs and arms straighten in the final position and the heels come down towards the floor in the final pose.



Position 4 and 9



Position 5 and 8

Bring the head and shoulders towards the knees.

Do not strain.

Breathing: Exhale while taking the left leg back.

Awareness: Physical – on the stretch through the Achilles' tendons, the back of the legs, shoulders and throat region, and on relaxing the hips.

Contra-indications: Cautions for inverted postures apply.

Position 6: Ashtanga Namaskara (salute with eight parts or points)

Keep the hands and feet in place.

Lower the knees, chest and chin to the floor; the feet will come up on to the toes.

In the final position only the toes, knees, chest, hands and chin touch the floor. The knees, chest and chin should touch the floor simultaneously. If this is not possible, first lower the knees, then the chest, and finally the chin.

The buttocks, hips and abdomen should be raised.

Breathing: The breath is held out in this pose. There is no respiration.

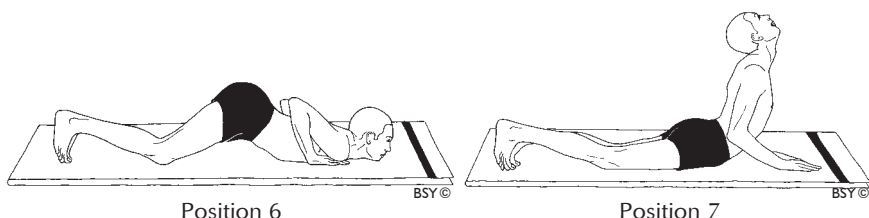
Awareness: Physical – on the arch in the lower back and on the abdominal region.

Contra-indications: People with serious back problems, high blood pressure or heart conditions should not do this practice.

Position 7: Bhujangasana (cobra pose)

Keep the hands and feet in place.

Slide the chest forward and raise first the head, the



shoulders, then, straightening the elbows, arch the back into the cobra pose. This will lower the buttocks and hips to the floor.

Bend the head back and direct the gaze upward to the eyebrow centre.

The thighs and hips remain on the floor and the arms support the trunk.

Unless the spine is very flexible the arms will remain slightly bent.

Breathing: Inhale while raising the torso and arching the back.

Awareness: Physical – on relaxation of the spine.

Contra-indications: Not advised for people suffering from peptic ulcer, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis or hyperthyroidism.

Position 8: Parvatasana (mountain pose)

The hands and feet do not move from position 7.

From bhujangasana assume parvatasana.

Keep the arms and legs straight, grip the floor with the toes and use the strength of the arms to raise the buttocks and lower the heels to the floor.

Breathing: Exhale while raising the buttocks.

Awareness: As for position 5.

Position 9: Ashwa Sanchalanasana (equestrian pose)

Keep the palms flat on the floor and the right foot in place.

Bend the left leg and bring the left foot forward between the hands. Simultaneously, lower the right knee so that it touches the floor and push the pelvis forward.

Tilt the head backward, arch the back and gaze at the eyebrow centre.

Breathing: Inhale while assuming the pose.

Awareness: As for position 4.

Position 10: Padahastasana (hand to foot pose)

Bring the right foot forward next to the left foot.

Straighten both legs.

Bring the forehead as close to the knees as possible without straining.

Breathing: Exhale while performing the movement.

Awareness: As for position 3.

Position 11: Hasta Utthanasana (raised arms pose)

Keep the arms and spine in a straight line.

Raise the torso and stretch the arms above the head.

Keep the arms separated, shoulder width apart.

Bend the head, arms and upper trunk backward slightly.

Breathing: Inhale while straightening the body.

Awareness: As for position 2.

Position 12: Pranamasana (prayer pose)

Bring the palms together in front of the chest.

Breathing: Exhale while assuming the final position.

Awareness: As for position 1.

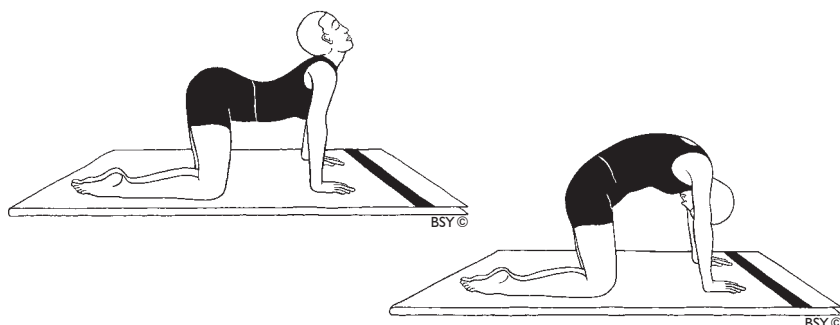
Positions 13–24

The twelve positions of surya namaskara are practised twice to complete one round. Positions 1 to 12 constitute half a round. In the second half, the positions are repeated with two small changes related to ashwa sanchalanasana:

- a) In position 16, instead of stretching the right foot backward, stretch the left foot back.
- b) In position 21, bend the right leg and bring the right foot between the hands.

Conclusion: On the completion of each half round, lower the arms to the side, relax the body and concentrate on the breath until it returns to normal. After completing surya namaskara, practise shavasana for a few minutes. This will allow the heartbeat and respiration to return to normal and all the muscles to relax.

MARJARI-ASANA (cat stretch pose)



Technique

Sit in vajrasana.

Raise the buttocks and stand on the knees.

Lean forward and place the hands flat on the floor beneath the shoulders with the fingers facing forward.

The hands should be in line with the knees; the arms and thighs should be perpendicular to the floor.

The knees may be slightly separated so that they are well aligned under the hips.

This is the starting position.

Inhale while raising the head and depressing the spine so that the back becomes concave.

Expand the abdomen fully and fill the lungs with the maximum amount of air. Hold the breath for 3 seconds.

Exhale while lowering the head and stretching the spine upward.

At the end of exhalation, contract the abdomen and pull in the buttocks.

The head will now be between the arms, facing the thighs.

Hold the breath for 3 seconds, accentuating the arch of the spine and the abdominal contraction.

This is one round.

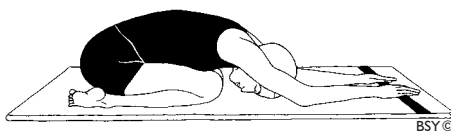
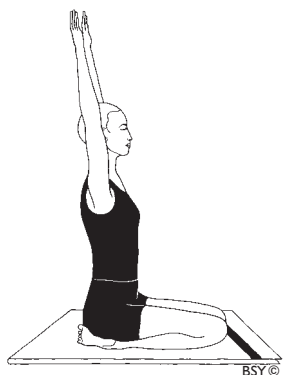
Breathing: Perform the movement breathing as slowly as is comfortable. Aim at taking at least 5 seconds for both inhalation and exhalation.

Duration: Perform 5 to 10 full rounds for general purposes.

Awareness: Physical – on the flexion of the spine from top to bottom, and on the breath synchronized with the movement.

Practice note: Do not bend the arms at the elbows. Keep the arms and thighs vertical throughout.

SHASHANKASANA (pose of the moon or hare pose)



Technique

Sit in vajrasana, placing the palms on the thighs just above the knees.

Close the eyes and relax, keeping the spine and head straight.

While inhaling, raise the arms above the head, keeping them straight and shoulder width apart.

Exhale while bending the trunk forward from the hips, keeping the arms and head straight and in line with the trunk.

At the end of the movement, the hands and forehead should rest on the floor in front of the knees.

If possible, the arms and forehead should touch the floor at the same time.

Bend the arms slightly so that they are fully relaxed and let the elbows rest on the floor.

Retain the breath for up to 5 seconds in the final position.

Then simultaneously inhale and slowly raise the arms and trunk to the vertical position. Keep the arms and head in line with the trunk.

Breathe out while lowering the hands to the knees.

This is one round.

Practise 3 to 5 rounds.

Duration: Beginners should slowly increase the length of time in the final position until they are able to hold it comfortably for at least 3 minutes with normal breathing. Those who wish to calm anger and frayed nerves should further increase the time to 10 minutes, breathing normally.

Awareness: Physical – in the final position, on the pressure of the abdomen against the thighs; on the alignment of arms, neck and head moving into and out of the asana; on the breath synchronized with the physical movement.

Contra-indications: Not to be performed by people with very high blood pressure, slipped disc or those who suffer from vertigo.

SIMHAGARJANASANA (roaring lion pose)

Technique

Sit in simhasana.

Open the eyes and gaze at the eyebrow centre, adopting shambhavi mudra.

Relax the whole body.

Keep the mouth closed.

Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose.

At the end of inhalation, open the mouth and extend the tongue out as far as possible towards the chin.



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While slowly exhaling, produce a clear, steady 'aaa' sound from the throat, keeping the mouth wide open. Do not strain or force the sound in any way.

At the end of exhalation, close the mouth and breathe in.

This is one round.

Breathing: Inhale slowly through the nose and then slowly exhale through the mouth with the 'aaah' sound.

Duration: To maintain general health practise 5 to 10 rounds daily.

The eyes, tongue and mouth may be relaxed for a few moments between each round.

This asana may be performed at any time.

Awareness: Physical – on opening the chest, and the sensation in the eyes and tongue. While inhaling, on the breath. While exhaling, on the sound produced, the feeling of emotional release, and the effect on the throat area.

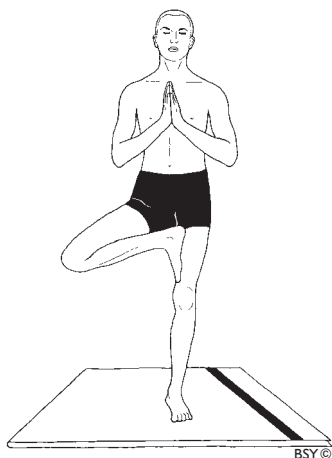
EKA PADA PRANAMASANA (one-legged prayer pose)

Technique

Stand upright with the feet together and the arms at the sides. Focus the gaze on a fixed point in front of the body.

Bend the right leg, grasp the ankle and place the sole of the foot on the inside of the left thigh. The heel should be close to the perineum and the right knee should point out to the side.

When the body is balanced, place the hands in prayer



position in front of the chest for the final position.

Release the hands and then the foot.

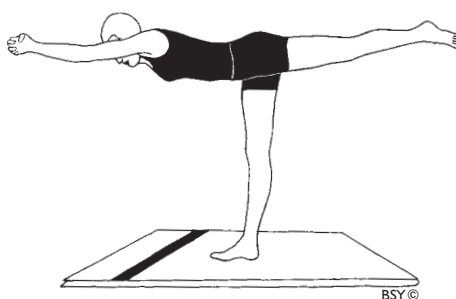
Relax completely in the starting position, and change sides.

Breathing: Breathe normally throughout the practice.

Duration: Practise up to 3 rounds on each leg, holding the final position for up to 2 minutes.

Awareness: Physical – on a fixed point at eye level.

EKA PADASANA (one foot pose)



Technique

Stand relaxed, with the feet together.

Raise the arms directly above the head and interlock the fingers with the palms together.

Bend forward slowly from the hips, keeping the trunk, head and arms in a straight line and transferring the weight on to the right leg.

Simultaneously raise the left leg straight back, keeping it in line with the trunk.

The body should pivot from the right hip joint.

In the final position the left leg, trunk, head and arms are all in one straight, horizontal line. The right leg is straight and vertical.

Focus the gaze on the hands.

Hold the final position for as long as is comfortable and then, keeping the arms, back and leg aligned, return to the upright position.

Slowly lower the arms and return to the starting position.
Repeat the movement, raising the right leg back.

Breathing: Inhale while raising the arms.

Exhale while bending to assume the final position.

Breathe normally in the final position.

Inhale while returning to the upright position.

Exhale while lowering the arms.

Duration: Up to 3 times on each side, holding for as long as is comfortable each time.

Awareness: Physical – on maintaining the alignment of limbs and spine, and on maintaining balance.

Contra-indications: People with lower back problems, heart problems or high blood pressure should not do this asana.

SARAL NATARAJASANA (preparatory Lord Shiva's pose)

Technique

Stand with the feet together and focus on a fixed point.
Bend the right knee and grasp the ankle with the right hand behind the body.

Keep both knees together and maintain the balance.

Slowly raise and stretch the right leg backward, as high as comfortable.



Make sure the right hip does not twist and the leg is raised directly behind the body.

Reach upward and forward with the left arm, bringing the tip of the index finger and thumb of the left hand together to form jnana mudra. Focus the gaze on the left hand.

This is the final position.

Hold the position for as long as is comfortable.

Lower the left arm to the side.

Lower the right leg, bringing the knees together. Release the right ankle and lower the foot to the floor. Lower the right arm to the side. Relax, then repeat with the left leg.

Breathing: Breathe normally throughout the practice.

Contra-indications: People who suffer from a weak heart, high blood pressure, back problems, hernia, colitis, peptic or duodenal ulcers, or vertigo should not practise this asana.

GARUDASANA (eagle pose)

Technique

Assume the standing position and focus the gaze on a fixed spot.

Bend the right leg and twist it around the left leg. The right thigh should be in front of the left thigh and the top of the right foot should rest on the calf of the left leg.

Bend the elbows and bring them in front of the chest.

Twist the forearms around each other with the left elbow remaining below.

Place the palms together to resemble an eagle's beak.

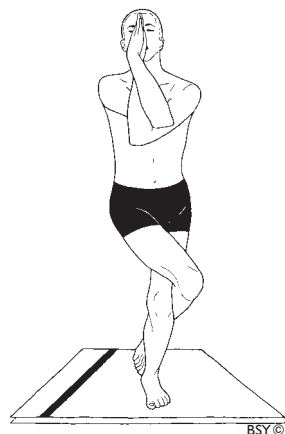
Balance in this position for some time, then slowly bend the left knee and lower the body, keeping the back straight, until the elbows come down to the knees and the tip of the right big toe touches the floor.

Keep the eyes focused on the fixed point.

Hold the final position for as long as is comfortable, then raise the body, and release the legs and arms.

Relax with the eyes closed.

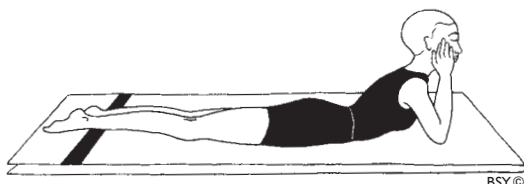
Repeat with the legs and arms the opposite way around. Practise up to 3 rounds on each side.



Breathing: Breathe normally throughout the practice.

Awareness: Physical – on maintaining balance while lowering and raising the body.

MAKARASANA (crocodile pose)



Technique

Lie flat on the stomach.

Raise the head and shoulders and rest the chin in the palms of the hands with the elbows on the floor.

Keep the elbows together for a more pronounced arch to the spine. Separate the elbows slightly to relieve excess pressure on the neck.

In makarasana the effect is felt at two points: the neck and the lower back. If the elbows are too far in front, tension will be felt in the neck; if they are drawn too close to the chest, tension will be felt more in the lower back. Adjust the position of the elbows so that these two points are equally balanced. The ideal position is when the whole spine is equally relaxed.

Relax the whole body and close the eyes.

After some time, again become aware of the body and surroundings, and gently and smoothly release the posture.

Breathing: Natural and rhythmic, or practise inhaling, moving the awareness up along the spine from the tail bone to the neck and exhaling, bringing the awareness back down from the neck to the tail bone. Feel the breath moving up and down the spine. This will quickly activate the healing energies in this area.

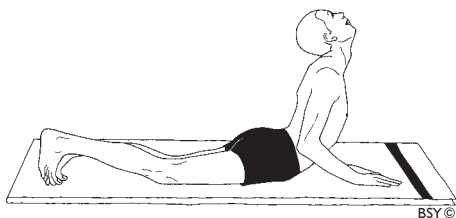
For lower back pain due to tension, concentrate on this area and feel it expanding and relaxing with every inhalation and exhalation.

Duration: For as long as is comfortable.

Awareness: Physical – with concentration on the lower back, and relaxing the whole body, and on the breathing process.

Contra-indications: Those with back conditions, such as exaggerated lumbar curve, should not practise this asana if any pain is experienced.

BHUJANGASANA (cobra pose)



Technique

Lie flat on the stomach with the legs straight, feet together and the soles of the feet uppermost.

Place the palms of the hands flat on the floor, below and slightly to the side of the shoulders, with the fingers together and pointing forward.

Position the arms so that the elbows point backward and are close to the sides of the body.

Rest the forehead on the floor and close the eyes.

Relax the whole body, especially the lower back.

Slowly raise the head.

Gently tilt the head backward, so that the chin points forward and the back of the neck is compressed, then raise the neck and then the shoulders.

Straighten the elbows, using the back muscles first, then the arm muscles to raise the trunk further and arch the back.

In the final position, the pubic bone remains in contact with the floor and the navel is raised a maximum of 3 cm. If the navel is raised too high, the bend tends to be in the knees and not in the back.

The arms may or may not be straight; this will depend on the flexibility of the back.

Hold the final position.

To return to the starting position, slowly release the upper back by bending the arms, lower the navel, chest, shoulders and finally the forehead to the floor.

Relax the lower back muscles.

This is one round.

Breathing: Inhale while raising the torso.

Breathe normally in the final position or retain the breath if the pose is held for a short time.

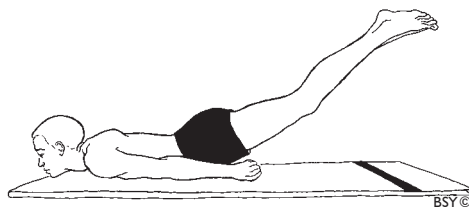
Exhale while lowering the torso.

Duration: Practise up to 5 rounds, gradually increasing the length of time in the final position.

Awareness: Physical – on the smooth, systematic arching movement of the back, the stretching of the abdomen, and on synchronizing the breath with the movement.

Contra-indications: People suffering from peptic ulcer, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis or hyperthyroidism should not practise this asana without the guidance of a competent teacher.

SHALABHASANA (locust pose)



Technique

Lie flat on the stomach with the legs and feet together and the soles of the feet uppermost.

The arms may be placed either under the body or by the sides, with the palms downward or the hands clenched. Stretch the chin slightly forward and rest it on the floor throughout the practice.

Close the eyes and relax the body.

This is the starting position.

Slowly raise the legs as high as possible without straining, keeping them straight and together.

The elevation of the legs is produced by applying pressure with the arms against the floor and contracting the lower back muscles.

Hold the final position for as long as is comfortable without strain.

Slowly lower the legs to the floor.

This is one round.

Return to the starting position and relax the body with the head turned to one side.

Allow the respiration and heartbeat to return to normal.

Breathing: Inhale deeply in the starting position.

Retain the breath inside while raising the legs and holding the position. Exhale while lowering the legs.

Beginners may find it helpful to inhale while raising the legs.

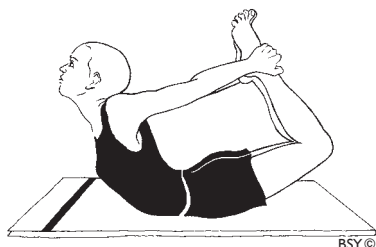
Advanced practitioners may exhale after returning to the starting position.

Duration: Up to 5 rounds when performed dynamically. Up to 3 rounds when performed statically.

Awareness: Physical – on the lower back, abdomen and heart, and on synchronizing the breath with the movement.

Contra-indications: Shalabhasana requires a great deal of physical effort, so it should not be practised by people with a weak heart, coronary thrombosis or high blood pressure. Those suffering from peptic ulcer, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis and other such conditions are also advised not to practise this asana.

DHANURASANA (bow pose)



Technique

Lie flat on the stomach with the legs and feet together, and the arms and hands beside the body.

Bend the knees and bring the heels close to the buttocks.

Clasp the hands around the ankles.

Place the chin on the floor.

This is the starting position.

Tense the leg muscles and push the feet away from the body. Arch the back, lifting the thighs, chest and head together. Keep the arms straight.

In the final position the head is tilted back and the abdomen supports the entire body on the floor. The only muscular contraction is in the legs; the back and arms remain relaxed.

Hold the final position for as long as is comfortable and then, slowly relaxing the leg muscles, lower the legs, chest and head to the starting position.

Release the pose and relax in the prone position until the respiration returns to normal.

This is one round. Practise 3 or up to 5 rounds.

Breathing: Inhale deeply in the starting position.

Retain the breath while raising the body.

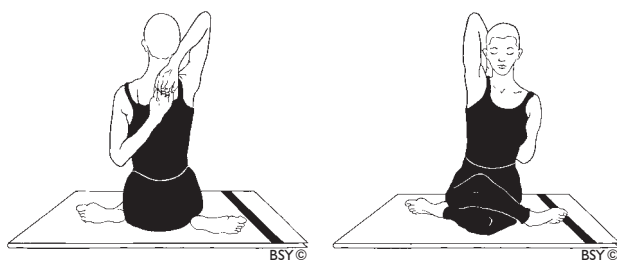
Retain the breath inside in the final position or practise slow, deep breathing so that the body rocks gently in unison with the breath.

Exhale while returning to the prone position.

Awareness: Physical – on the abdominal region, the back, or the rhythmic expansion and contraction of the abdomen to the slow, deep breathing.

Contra-indications: People who suffer from a weak heart, high blood pressure, hernia, colitis, peptic or duodenal ulcers should not attempt this practice. This asana should not be practised before sleep at night as it stimulates the adrenal glands and the sympathetic nervous system.

GOMUKHASANA (cow's face pose)



Technique

Sit in dhyana veerasana so that the right knee is directly above the left knee.

Stretch the left arm to the side and then fold it behind the back.

Stretch the right arm up above the head, then fold it over the right shoulder.

The back of the left hand should lie in contact with the spine while the palm of the right hand rests against the spine.

Try to clasp the fingers of both hands behind the back.

Bring the raised elbow behind the head so that the head presses against the inside of the raised arm.

The spine should be erect and the head back. Close the eyes.

Stay in this position for up to 2 minutes.

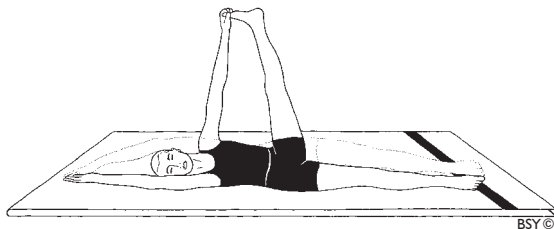
Unclasp the hands, straighten the legs and repeat with

the left knee uppermost and the left arm over the left shoulder.

Breathing: Normal in the final position.

Awareness: Physical – on respiration.

HASTA PADA ANGUSHTHASANA (finger to toe stretch)



Technique

Lie on the right side with the arms stretched over the head, so that the whole body is balanced in one straight line along the floor. The palm of the left hand should rest on top of the palm of the right hand.

The left foot should rest on top of the right foot.

This is the starting position.

Keep the arms and legs straight throughout the practice. Raise the left leg and arm to their full extent and, keeping them straight, take hold of the big toe without bending the knee. If this is impossible, take hold of a suitable point on the leg to give support while gently stretching the hip. This is the final position.

Hold the final position for a short duration.

Lower the arm and leg to the starting position.

Practise a maximum of 10 times on this side.

Lie in shavasana to relax with normal breathing.

Roll over to the other side and repeat.

Breathing: Inhale while raising the limbs.

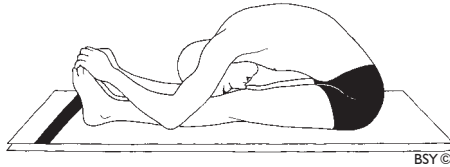
Exhale while lowering.

Awareness: Physical – on the stretch in the hip and raised leg while holding the pose, on the balance, or on synchronizing the movement with the breath,

Contra-indications: Those suffering from sciatica should not practise this asana.

Practice note: Make sure that the whole body stays in a straight line, without allowing it to curve or bend at the buttocks.

PASCHIMOTTANASANA (back stretching pose)



Technique

Sit on the floor with the legs outstretched, feet together and hands on the knees.

This is the starting position.

Relax the whole body.

Slowly bend forward from the hips, sliding the hands down the legs. Try to grasp the big toes with the fingers and thumbs. If this is impossible, hold the heels, ankles or any part of the legs that can be reached comfortably. Move slowly without forcing or jerking.

Hold the position for a few seconds. Relax the back and leg muscles, allowing them to gently stretch.

Keeping the legs straight and utilizing the arm muscles, not the back muscles, begin to bend the elbows and gently bring the trunk down towards the legs, maintaining a firm grip on the toes, feet or legs.

Try to touch the knees with the forehead. Do not strain.

This is the final position.

Hold the position for as long as is comfortable and relax.

Slowly return to the starting position.

This is one round.

Breathing: Inhale in the starting position.

Exhale slowly while bending forward.

Inhale in the static position.

Exhale while bringing the trunk further towards the legs with the arms.

Breathe slowly and deeply in the final position or retain the breath out if holding for a short duration.

Inhale while returning to the starting position.

Duration: Beginners should perform up to 5 rounds, staying in the final position for only a short length of time. Adept may maintain the final position for up to 5 minutes.

Awareness: Physical – on the abdomen, relaxation of the back and leg muscles, or the slow breathing process.

Contra-indications: People who suffer from slipped disc, sciatica or hernia should not practise paschimottan-asana.

ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA (half spinal twist)

Technique

Sit with the legs stretched out in front of the body.

Bend the right leg and place the right foot flat on the floor on the outside of the left knee.

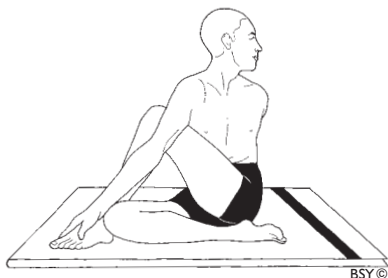
The toes of the right foot should face forward.

Bend the left leg and bring the foot around to the right buttock. The outside edge of the foot should be in contact with the floor.

Pass the left arm through the space between the chest and the right knee, and place it against the outside of the right leg.

Hold the right foot or ankle with the left hand so that the right knee is close to the left armpit.

Sit up as straight as possible. Raise the right arm in front of the body and gaze at the fingertips.



Slowly twist to the right, simultaneously moving the arm, trunk and head.

Use the left arm as a lever against the right leg to twist the trunk as far as possible without using the back muscles.

Follow the tips of the fingers of the right hand with the gaze and look over the right shoulder.

Do not strain the back.

Bend the right elbow and place the arm around the back of the waist.

The back of the right hand should wrap around the left side of the waist.

Alternatively, it can be placed as high as possible between the shoulder blades with the fingers pointing up. This arm position enforces the straightness of the spine.

Reverse the movements to come out of the posture and repeat on the other side.

Breathing: Inhale in the forward position.

Exhale while twisting the trunk.

Breathe deeply and slowly without strain in the final position.

Inhale while returning to the starting position.

Duration: Practise once on each side, gradually increasing the holding time to 1 or 2 minutes on each side of the body or up to 30 breaths.

Awareness: Physical – on keeping the spine straight, and on the movement of the abdomen created by the breath in the final position.

Contra-indications: Pregnant women should avoid this practice. People suffering from peptic ulcer, hernia or hyperthyroidism should only practise this pose under the guidance of a competent teacher.

People with sciatica or slipped disc should not practise it.

Variation: For beginners and those with stiff bodies or bulky thighs, instead of bending one leg and placing its foot by the side of the buttock, that leg can remain straight. Also, instead of one hand holding the ankle, wrap the arm around the thigh, hugging the knee to the chest.

VIPAREETA KARANI ASANA (inverted pose)

Technique

Lie flat on the back with the legs and feet together in a straight line. Place the hands and arms close to the body with the palms facing down.

Relax the whole body.

Raise both legs, keeping them straight and together.

Move the legs over the body towards the head.

Push down on the arms and hands, raising the buttocks.

Roll the spine from the floor, taking the legs further over the head.

Turn the palms up, bend the elbows and let the top of the hips rest on the base of the palms near the wrists. The hands cup the hips and support the weight of the body.

Raise the legs to the vertical position and relax the feet.

In the final position, the weight of the body rests on the shoulders, neck and elbows, the trunk is at a 45 degree angle to the floor and the legs are vertical. Note that the chin does not press firmly against the chest.

Close the eyes and relax in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

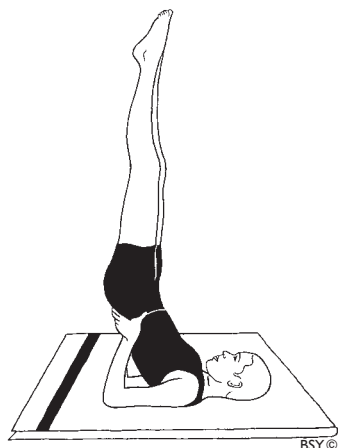
To return to the starting position, lower the legs over the head, then place the arms and hands close to the body, palms facing down.

Slowly lower the spine, vertebra by vertebra, along the floor.

Do not lift the head.

When the buttocks reach the floor, lower the legs, keeping them straight.

Relax the body in shavasana.



Breathing: Inhale while in the lying position.

Retain the breath inside while assuming the final pose.

Once the body is steady in the final pose, practise normal or ujjayi breathing.

Retain the breath inside while lowering the body to the floor.

Duration: When first practising, hold for a few seconds only, gradually increasing the time over a period of months to an optimum of 3 to 5 minutes for general health purposes. This practice should be performed only once during the asana program.

Other details: As for sarvangasana.

Practice note: This asana can be a preparatory practice for sarvangasana. It is highly recommended as it gives similar benefits to sarvangasana with less pressure on the neck. To begin with, it may be necessary to bend the knees when raising and lowering the legs.

SARVANGASANA (shoulder stand pose)

Technique

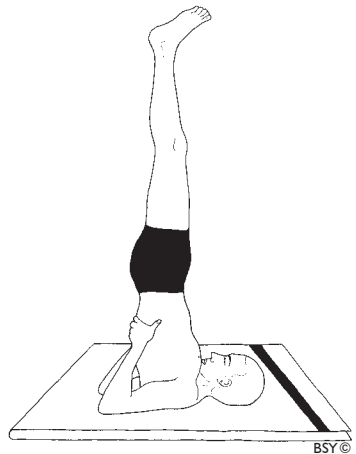
Lie on the back on a folded blanket.

Check that the head and spine are aligned and that the legs are straight with the feet together.

Place the hands beside the body with the palms facing down.

Relax the entire body and mind.

Contract the abdominal muscles and, with the support of the arms, slowly raise the legs to the vertical position, keeping them straight.



When the legs are vertical, press the arms and hands down on the floor.

Slowly and smoothly roll the buttocks and spine off the floor, raising the trunk to a vertical position.

Turn the palms of the hands upward, bend the elbows and place the hands behind the ribcage, slightly away from the spine, to support the back. The elbows should be about shoulder width apart.

Gently push the chest forward so that it presses firmly against the chin.

In the final position, the legs are vertical, together and in a straight line with the trunk. The body is supported by the shoulders, nape of the neck and back of the head. The arms provide stability, the chest rests against the chin and the feet are relaxed.

Close the eyes. Relax the whole body in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

To return to the starting position, bring the legs forward until the feet are above and behind the back of the head. Keep the legs straight.

Slowly release the position of the hands and place the arms on the floor beside the body with the palms down. Gradually lower each vertebra to the floor, followed by the buttocks, so that the legs resume their initial vertical position.

Lower the legs to the floor slowly, keeping the knees straight.

Perform this action without using the arms for support. The whole movement should combine balance with control so that the body contacts the floor slowly and gently.

Relax in shavasana until the respiration and heartbeat return to normal.

Breathing: Inhale in the starting position.

Retain the breath inside while assuming the final pose.

Practise slow, deep abdominal breathing in the final pose.

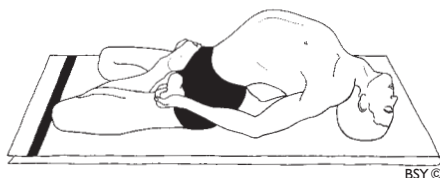
Retain the breath inside while lowering the body to the floor.

Duration: When first practising, hold the final position for a few seconds only, gradually increasing the time over a period of weeks to an optimum of 3 to 5 minutes for general health. This practice should be performed only once during the asana program.

Awareness: Physical – on the various sensations of the body adjusting to its inversion, on control of the movement, on the neck or thyroid gland, and on the breath.

Contra-indications: This asana should not be practised by people suffering from enlarged thyroid, liver or spleen, cervical spondylitis, slipped disc, high blood pressure or other heart ailments, weak blood vessels in the eyes, thrombosis or impure blood. It should be avoided during menstruation and advanced stages of pregnancy.

MATSYASANA (fish pose)



Technique

Sit in padmasana and relax the whole body.

Carefully bend backward, supporting the body with the arms and elbows. Lift the chest slightly, take the head back and lower the crown of the head to the floor.

Hold the big toes and rest the elbows on the floor.

Adjust the position of the head so that the maximum arch of the back is attained.

Relax the arms and the whole body, allowing the head, buttocks and legs to support the weight of the body.

Close the eyes and breathe slowly and deeply.

Return to the starting position, reversing the order of movements.

Repeat the asana, with the legs crossed the other way.

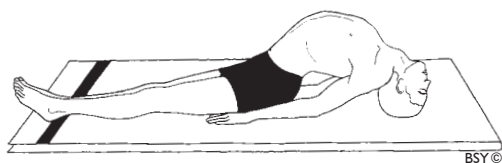
Breathing: Breathe deeply and slowly in the final position.

Duration: The final position may be held for up to 5 minutes, although 1 to 3 minutes is sufficient for general health.

Awareness: Physical – on the abdomen, chest, neck and head or breath.

Contra-indications: People who suffer from heart disease, peptic ulcers, hernia, back conditions or any serious illness should not practise this asana. Pregnant women should also not attempt it.

Practice note: It is important that the body is slowly lowered into and raised from the final position by using the elbows as a support. The movement should be performed with control and care as it is very easy to injure the spine.



Variation: (for beginners)

Stretch both legs straight in front of the body.

Lean backward, using the arms for support, and rest the top of the head on the floor. Arch the back and place both palms on the thighs or let them rest on the floor. As an alternative, this can be done from the lying position. Return to the starting position after some time in the final position.

ADVASANA (reversed corpse pose)



Technique

Lie on the stomach.

Stretch both arms above the head with the palms facing downward. The forehead should be resting on the floor. Relax the whole body in the same way as described for shavasana.

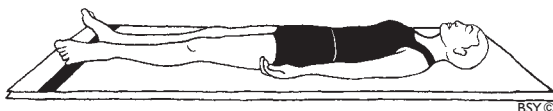
If there is difficulty breathing or a sense of suffocation is experienced, a pillow may be placed under the chest. After some time, again become aware of the body and surroundings, and gently and smoothly release the posture.

Breathing: Natural and rhythmic. The number of breaths may be counted as in shavasana while gently pushing the abdomen against the floor.

Duration: For relaxation in the treatment of ailments, it should be performed for as long as is comfortable. Before or during an asana session, a few minutes is sufficient.

Awareness: Physical – on relaxing the whole body, and on the breath.

SHAVASANA (corpse pose)



Technique

Lie flat on the back with the arms about 15 cm away from the body, palms facing upward. A thin pillow or folded cloth may be placed behind the head to prevent discomfort. Let the fingers curl up slightly.

Move the feet slightly apart to a comfortable position and close the eyes.

The head and spine should be in a straight line.

Make sure the head does not fall to one side or the other.

Relax the whole body and stop all physical movement.

Become aware of the natural breath and allow it to become rhythmic and relaxed.

After some time, again become aware of the body and surroundings, and gently and smoothly release the posture.

Breathing: Natural and relaxed, or begin to count the breaths from number 27 backwards to zero. Mentally repeat, “I am breathing in 27, I am breathing out 27, I am breathing in 26, I am breathing out 26”, and so on, back to zero.

If the mind wanders and the next number is forgotten, bring it back to the counting and start again at 27. If the mind can be kept on the breath for a few minutes, the body will relax.

Duration: According to time available. In general, the longer the better, although a minute or two is sufficient between asana practices.

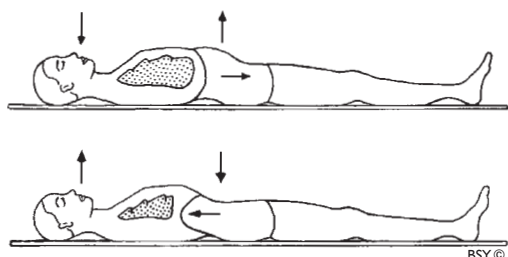
Awareness: Physical – first on relaxing the whole body, then on the breath.

Practice note: Do not move the body at all during the practice as even the slightest movement disturbs the practice.

PRANAYAMA

The main requirement in pranayama is that respiration be comfortable and relaxed. The breath should flow naturally and not be forced.

ABDOMINAL (OR DIAPHRAGMATIC) BREATHING



Technique

Lie in shavasana and relax the whole body.

Place the right hand on the abdomen just above the navel and the left hand over the centre of the chest.

Observe the spontaneous breath without controlling it in any way. Let it be absolutely natural.

To practise abdominal breathing, feel as though you are drawing the energy and breath in and out directly through the navel.

The right hand will move up with inhalation and down with exhalation. The left hand remains almost still.

Let the abdomen relax. Do not try to force the movement in any way.

Do not expand the chest or move the shoulders.

Feel the abdomen expanding and contracting.

Continue breathing slowly and deeply.

Inhale while expanding the abdomen as much as is comfortable, without expanding the ribcage.

At the end of the inhalation, the diaphragm will be compressing the abdomen and the navel will be at its highest point.

On exhalation, the diaphragm moves upward and the abdomen moves downward.

At the end of the exhalation, the abdomen will be contracted and the navel compressed towards the spine. Continue for a few minutes.

Relax any effort and once again watch the spontaneous breathing pattern.

Bring the awareness back to observing the physical body as a whole. Be aware of the surroundings and gently open the eyes.

YOGIC BREATHING

Technique

Sit in a meditation posture or lie in shavasana and relax the whole body.

Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdomen to expand fully.

Try to breathe so slowly that little or no sound of the breath can be heard.

Feel the air reaching into the bottom of the lungs.

At the end of abdominal expansion, start to expand the chest outward and upward.

When the ribs are fully expanded, inhale a little more until expansion is felt in the upper portion of the lungs around the base of the neck. The shoulders and collar bone should also move up slightly. Some tension will be felt in the neck muscles.

The rest of the body should be relaxed.

Feel the air filling the upper lobes of the lungs.

This completes one inhalation.

The whole process should be one continuous movement, each phase of breathing merging into the next without any obvious transition point. There should be no jerks or unnecessary strain. The breathing should be like the swell of the sea.

Now start to exhale.

First, relax the lower neck and upper chest, then allow the chest to contract downward and then inward.

Next, allow the diaphragm to push upward and toward the chest.

Without straining, try to empty the lungs as much as possible by drawing or pulling the abdominal wall as near as possible to the spine.

The entire movement should be harmonious and flowing.

Hold the breath for a few seconds at the end of exhalation.

This completes one round of yogic breathing.

At first perform 5 to 10 rounds and slowly increase to 10 minutes daily.

Relax any effort and once again watch the spontaneous breathing pattern.

Bring the awareness back to observing the physical body as a whole. Be aware of the surroundings and gently open the eyes.

BHASTRIKA PRANAYAMA (bellows breath)

Technique I: Preparatory practice

Sit in a comfortable meditation posture with the hands resting on the knees in either chin or jnana mudra.

Keep the head and spine straight, close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Take a deep breath in and breathe out forcefully through the nose. Immediately afterwards breathe in with the same force. Forceful inhalation results from fully expanding the abdominal muscles and forceful exhalation from firm contraction of the abdominal muscles. Do not strain.

During inhalation, the diaphragm descends and the abdomen moves outward. During exhalation, the diaphragm moves upward and the abdomen moves inward. The movements should be slightly exaggerated.

Continue in this manner, counting 10 breaths.

Take a deep breath in and breathe out slowly.

This is one round. Practise up to 5 rounds.

Practice note: When accustomed to this style of breathing, gradually increase the speed, always keeping the breath rhythmical. The force of inhalation and exhalation must be equal.

Awareness: Physical – on the breathing process and the physical movement of the abdomen.

Precautions: Bhastrika is a dynamic practice requiring a large expenditure of physical energy. Beginners are advised to take a short rest after each round. Avoid violent respiration, facial contortions and excessive shaking of the body. A feeling of faintness, excessive perspiration or vomiting indicates that the practice is being performed incorrectly. If any of these symptoms are experienced, the advice of a competent teacher should be sought.

This practice purifies the blood. However, if the stages are rushed, all the impurities will be ejected from the body in a rush, which may exacerbate conditions caused by detoxification. A slow, conscientious approach to this practice is therefore recommended.

Contra-indications: Bhastrika should not be practised by people with high blood pressure, heart disease, hernia, gastric ulcer, stroke, epilepsy, retinal problems, glaucoma or vertigo. The elderly, those suffering from lung diseases such as asthma and chronic bronchitis, those recovering from tuberculosis, or in the first trimester of pregnancy are recommended to practise only under the guidance of a competent teacher.

NADI SHODHANA (alternate nostril breathing)

Hand position: Nasagra Mudra (nosetip position)

Hold the fingers of the right hand in front of the face. Rest the index and middle fingers gently on the eyebrow centre. Both fingers should be relaxed.

The thumb is above the right nostril and the ring finger above the left. These two digits control the flow of breath in the nostrils by alternately pressing on one nostril, blocking the flow of breath, and then the other. The little finger is comfortably folded. When practising for long periods, the elbow may be supported in the palm of the left hand, although care is needed to prevent chest restriction.



Technique – ratio 1:1

Close the right nostril with the thumb and inhale through the left nostril.

At the same time count mentally, “1, Om; 2, Om; 3, Om”, until the inhalation ends comfortably. This is the basic count.

Breathe deeply without strain.

Close the left nostril with the ring finger and release the pressure of the thumb on the right nostril. While exhaling through the right nostril, simultaneously count, “1, Om; 2, Om; 3, Om”. The time for inhalation and exhalation should be equal.

Next, inhale through the right nostril, keeping the same count in the same manner.

At the end of inhalation, close the right nostril and open the left nostril. Exhale through the left nostril, counting as before.

This is one round.

Practise 5 to 10 rounds.

Extension: After one week, if there is no difficulty, increase the length of inhalation and exhalation by one count.

Continue to increase the count in this way until the count of 10:10 is reached.

Do not force the breath in any way. Be careful not to speed up the counting during exhalation to compensate

for shortage of breath. Reduce the count at the slightest sign of discomfort.

Technique – ratio 1:2

Ensure that the 1:1 ratio is perfected before progressing to a 1:2 ratio.

Initially halve the length of the inhalation. Inhale for a count of 5 and exhale for a count of 10.

Repeat on the other side.

This is one round.

Practise 5 to 10 rounds.

Extension: During the ensuing months of practice, continue extending the breath by adding one count to the inhalation and two to the exhalation, up to the count of 10: 20.

Contra-indications: The ratio 1:2 begins the process of introversion, which is not recommended for a depressed or withdrawn person. The extension of breath, involving longer counts, is not recommended for people with heart problems.

Technique – ratio 1:1:1 with Antar Kumbhaka (inner retention)

In this technique antar kumbhaka or internal breath retention is introduced. The inhalation and exhalation should be silent, smooth and controlled.

Begin with equal inhalation, inner retention and exhalation, using the ratio 1:1:1.

Close the right nostril and inhale slowly through the left nostril for a count of 5.

At the end of inhalation, close both nostrils and retain the air in the lungs for a count of 5.

Open the right nostril and exhale for a count of 5.

At the end of exhalation, inhale through the right nostril for a count of 5, keeping the left nostril closed.

Again, retain the breath for a count of 5 with both nostrils closed.

Open the left nostril and exhale for a count of 5.

This is one round using the ratio 5:5:5.

Maintain constant awareness of the count and of the breath.

Practise up to 10 rounds.

Extension: After becoming comfortable with the count of 5:5:5, the breath and kumbhaka can be lengthened.

Gradually increase the count by adding 1 unit to the inhalation, 1 unit to the retention and 1 unit to the exhalation. The count of one round will then be 6:6:6.

When this has been perfected and there is no discomfort, increase the count to 7:7:7.

Continue in this way until the count of 10:10:10 is reached.

Do not force the breath. At the slightest sign of strain reduce the count.

Contra-indications: This technique is not suitable for women in the later half of pregnancy. It is not recommended for people with heart problems, high blood pressure, emphysema or any major disorders.

BHRAMARI PRANAYAMA (humming bee breath)



Technique

Sit in a comfortable meditation asana, preferably padmasana or siddha/siddha yoni asana with the hands resting on the knees in jnana or chin mudra.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

The lips should remain gently closed with the teeth slightly separated throughout the practice. This allows the sound vibration to be heard and felt more distinctly. Raise the arms sideways and bend the elbows, bringing the hands to the ears. Use the index or middle fingers to plug the ears or the flaps of the ears may be pressed without inserting the fingers.

Bring the awareness to the centre of the head, where ajna chakra is located, and keep the body absolutely still. Inhale through the nose.

Exhale slowly and in a controlled manner while making a deep, steady humming sound like that of the black bee. The humming should be smooth, even and continuous for the duration of the exhalation. The sound should be soft and mellow, making the front of the skull reverberate. At the end of exhalation, the hands can be kept steady or returned to the knee and then raised again for the next round. The inhalation and exhalation should be smooth and controlled. This is one round.

Awareness: Physical – on the humming sound within the head and on the steady, even breath.

Duration: 5 to 10 rounds is sufficient in the beginning, then slowly increase to 10 to 15 minutes. In cases of extreme mental tension or anxiety, or when used to assist the healing process, practise for up to 30 minutes.

Contra-indications: Bhramari should not be performed while lying down. People suffering from severe ear infections should not practise this pranayama.

UJJAYI PRANAYAMA (the psychic breath)

Technique

Sit in any comfortable meditation asana.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Take the awareness to the breath in the nostrils and allow the breathing to become calm and rhythmic.

After some time, transfer the awareness to the throat.

Feel or imagine that the breath is being drawn in and out through the throat and not through the nostrils, as if it is taking place through a small hole in the throat.

As the breathing becomes slower and deeper, gently contract the glottis so that a soft snoring sound, like the breathing of a sleeping baby, is produced in the throat. If practised correctly, there will be a spontaneous contraction of the abdomen, without any effort being made.

Both inhalation and exhalation should be long, deep and controlled.

Practise yogic breathing while concentrating on the sound produced by the breath in the throat.

The sound of the breath should be audible to the practitioner alone.

Duration: Begin with 10 breaths and slowly increase to 5 minutes for general benefits.

Contra-indications: People who are too introverted by nature should not perform this practice.

Practice note: Ujjayi may be performed in any position, standing, sitting or lying. Those suffering from slipped disc or vertebral spondylitis may practise ujjayi in vajrasana or makarasana.

Relax the face as much as possible. Do not contract the throat too strongly. The contraction should be slight and applied continuously throughout the practice.



Index of Practices

Asana

Advasana (reversed corpse pose)	87
Ardha Matsyendrasana (half spinal twist)	80
Bandha Hasta Utthanasana (locked hand raising pose)	58
Bhujangasana (cobra pose)	73
Chakki Chalanasana (churning the mill)	51
Dhanurasana (bow pose)	76
Dwikonasana (double angle pose)	57
Eka Pada Pranamasana (one-legged prayer pose)	68
Eka Padasana (one foot pose)	69
Garudasana (eagle pose)	71
Gomukhasana (cow's face pose)	77
Hasta Pada Angushthasana (finger to toe stretch)	78
Kati Chakrasana (waist rotating pose)	55
Makarasana (crocodile pose)	72
Marjari-asana (cat stretch pose)	65
Matsyasana (fish pose)	85
Namaskarasana (salutation pose)	52
Paschimottanasana (back stretching pose)	79
Pawanmuktasana Part One	36
Saral Natarajasana (preparatory Lord Shiva's pose)	70
Sarvangasana (shoulder stand pose)	83
Shalabhasana (locust pose)	74
Shashankasana (pose of the moon or hare pose)	66
Shavasana (corpse pose)	87
Simhagarjanasana (roaring lion pose)	67
Supta Udarakarshanasana (sleeping abdominal stretch pose)	50

Surya Namaskara (salutations to the sun)	59
Tadasana (palm tree pose)	53
Tiryak Tadasana (swaying palm tree pose)	54
Trikonasana (triangle pose)	56
Vipareeta Karani Asana (inverted pose)	82

Pranayama

Abdominal (or diaphragmatic) breathing	89
Bhastrika Pranayama (bellows breath)	91
Bhramari Pranayama (humming bee breath)	95
Nadi shodhana (alternate nostril breathing)	92
Ujjayi Pranayama (the psychic breath)	96
Yogic breathing	90



Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series presenting the vast, timeless culture of yoga topic by topic through the voice of three generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati, Swami Satyananda Saraswati and Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati. The teachings are given in question and answer format with the inclusion of verses from the scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition.

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